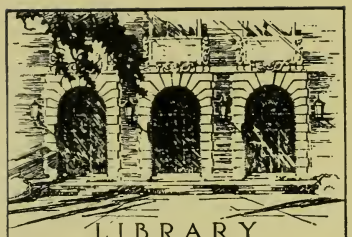

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THE MAN OF MARK.

THE

MAN OF MARK.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"RICHARD LANGDON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE MAN OF MARK.

CHAPTER I.

The day now arrived on which Ida had arranged to leave Sir John Marchfield's, and she wrote to her father informing him at what hour she might be expected home. Of course she had made this as late as possible, so as to give her sufficient time to call upon Mary Forester, and for the same reason she left with Henrietta in the carriage sufficiently early to catch the first train to H——.

After bidding adieu to her friend, Ida got into a carriage by herself, and considered how she was to arrange what she had in hand. Her errand was a difficult

and delicate one, for, without the faintest acquaintance with Mary Forester, she was about to question her regarding the relation in which she stood to a man of whose very name Ida was ignorant. Obstacles upon which she could not possibly calculate might stand in the way of her seeing Mary; she might expose herself to insult and mortifications; but, to a woman of Ida's indomitable will, all these considerations had only a trifling weight. Her mind was thoroughly made up to find out whether this Mary Forester knew Aubrey De Vaux or not, and she felt certain of carrying out her purpose successfully.

The train was not very long in arriving at the station for H——, and here Ida hired a somewhat old-fashioned conveyance to take her to Miss Forester's residence. As she drove along the green and pleasant lanes that intersected this part of the country, Ida could not help admiring the beauties of the landscape which un-

folded themselves on every side. Seen in the warm sunshine of a cheerful summer forenoon, the rich meadows and swelling uplands were suggestive of rural delights. The lambs gambolled amid the green pastures, the sleek cattle browsed peacefully in the fields, and no smoking chimney-stalks interfered with the smiling amenity of a purely agricultural country. As Ida drove along, she hardly gave a thought upon the errand on which she had come, for it was her invariable custom always to act upon the impulses of the moment, and not to rehearse what part she intended to play. She simply intended to announce herself as a visitor who wished to see Miss Forester, and would be entirely guided by the circumstances of her reception in what she had to say. There was no shade of nervousness in her manner, and she did not anticipate much difficulty in ascertaining all that she wished to learn.

After a drive of nearly two miles, the

carriage drew up at the gate of a tastefully laid out garden, in the middle of which stood the pretty cottage where Mary Forester lived. Ida at once alighted, and, advancing to the door, inquired from the maid-servant who appeared whether she could see Miss Forester.

"Miss Forester is in, ma'am, but she is not very well, and I don't know if she will be able," was the reply.

"Would you be good enough to tell her that a lady who has come some little distance is anxious to see her, and that she will only detain her a very few minutes?" said Ida.

"Perhaps you would walk into the parlour while I go and see," said the servant, opening the door of that room.

Ida went in and sat down, and took a survey of the apartment in which she found herself, but even her fastidious taste could find no fault with the neat and simple

furniture, and its arrangement. The table in the centre of the room was covered with a pretty flowered cloth, on which were spread several handsomely bound volumes, chiefly the gift of Mr. Massey. Light chintzes of a tasteful pattern covered the chairs and sofa, while the snowy muslin window curtains gave a look of cleanness and tidiness to the entire room. A cottage piano stood opposite the door, and some well selected prints and engravings were hung on the walls. Although there was no air of showiness about the house, it could be seen that the inmates were probably in easy circumstances, and Ida felt that she must exercise great delicacy in making her communication.

Mary was arranging a small vase of flowers in her bedroom when the servant informed her that a strange lady wished to see her. Mary was a little surprised at this announcement, for she had few friends who would be likely to come in this way, and

she inquired if her visitor had given any name.

"No, Miss. Mary; she only said I was to tell you that a lady wanted to see you," was the reply.

"Is it an old lady or a young one?" inquired Mary, with pardonable curiosity.

"Oh! quite young; and she seems to be very pretty, and has such an expensive beautiful dress on," answered the girl, almost as much interested as her mistress.

"Did you never see her before?"

"I am sure I never did," said the servant, confidently; "and she has got old Joe Springett's carriage, that goes to meet the trains, waiting at the door, so she must have come from a distance."

"Well, say that I will see her directly," said Mary, proceeding to tidy her hair and add one or two slight ornaments to her dress. Her curiosity was more than ever awakened, and she was quite at a loss to imagine who this strange lady could be.

In a few minutes she entered the parlour where Ida was sitting, and, when she made her appearance, the latter at once rose from her seat and bowed courteously. The two ladies presented a great contrast in appearance, style, and dress, but each possessed charms which did not need the adornments of art to heighten them. Mary was very simply dressed in a neat lilac print, and her trim little jacket was embroidered with a red bordering of her own working. Her face was slightly flushed with a deceptive glow, and her soft eyes wore their wonted expression of innocent trustfulness. There was an aspect of guileless sweetness in every feature, which went far to disarm the feelings of jealous anger with which Ida was disposed to regard the woman she thought might be her rival. Ida was fashionably and expensively dressed in a brown travelling silk dress, with a rich black silk tunic over it, and her straw bonnet, trimmed with brown velvet, was of the latest Parisian

workmanship. A thin black lace veil somewhat shaded her fine features; but Mary was struck with the aristocratic and dignified bearing of her visitor.

"I presume I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Forester?" said Ida, as she resumed her seat.

"Yes, that is my name," said Mary, with a somewhat embarrassed air, for she did not exactly know in what way she ought to receive her unexpected visitor.

"I must apologise, Miss Forester, for intruding upon you at such an early hour; but I happen to be paying a visit to this part of the country, and this was the only time I could arrange to call and see you."

"Oh! we do not consider this very early," said Mary, "for my aunt likes old-fashioned ways, and we begin the day in good time."

"And quite right, too. I wish it was the custom with that part of the world

which is supposed to set the fashion to the rest, to inculcate earlier hours for everything. But I shall not detain you long, and will now explain my motive in calling for you. I have a very intimate friend who is in much distress just now, owing to the disappearance of her only brother, and she wrote to me the other day to ask if I could be of any assistance to her. This brother is a young and remarkably handsome man, and moreover is the heir to a very valuable estate, but he is subject to fits of gloomy melancholy, and, while these last, he is scarcely responsible for his actions. At these times he generally absents himself from home, and, when the unfortunate paroxysm has passed away, he returns again to his friends. However, many months ago he left home as usual, and, to this hour, has never returned. His friends, of course, have made every possible inquiry, but they are completely baffled, and the last trace of him was in this neighbourhood. It appears

that he was seen one day not far from this village, in company with a Miss Forester; and, as I was so near, I was unwilling to lose the opportunity of calling upon you to inquire if, by any chance, you know where he is to be found? You now understand why I have taken the liberty of disturbing you at this early hour — and let me hope you can give me some assistance."

During the time Ida narrated this artfully-framed tale, Mary listened with intense and increasing interest, for she felt a presentiment that it was Milroy whom the lady was describing. Her face first flushed with emotion, and then grew very pale, all which signs of confusion Ida narrowly marked. When the latter finished, Mary's heart beat violently, and feelings to which she had some time been a stranger began to agitate her bosom. She felt the necessity of appearing calm and self-possessed, however, before her visitor, so she made an effort to ask, in

her ordinary tones, the name of this young man.

"Well, the name is immaterial at present," said Ida; "but I will show you his likeness, and that will at once prove if we are on the right scent."

Poor Mary's agitation was now greater than ever, as she watched Ida deliberately take off one glove, displaying a beautiful white hand on which rich rings glittered, and proceed to open a silver card-case, from which she took out a photograph. It was the likeness of Aubrey De Vaux which Henrietta Marchfield saw, and she handed it to Mary, at the same time looking keenly into her face. No sooner did Mary see the picture than she gave a slight involuntary exclamation of surprise.

"I do indeed know the original of this only too well," she said, in a mournful tone. "Edward Milroy, is that the name of your friend's brother?"

"Milroy! no, that is not the least like

it; but, very possibly, he took another name when he left home in this way. Still, you are positive this is the picture of a gentleman whom you know?"

"That indeed I am. I will show you a photograph of himself which he gave me the very last time we met," said Mary, her eyes filling with tears, as a host of recollections occurred to her memory. With these words she quitted the room, and Ida had time to think over what had passed between them. So far everything had gone as she wished, and there seemed little doubt but that she should unravel the mystery connected with the personage who so strangely resembled Mr. De Vaux. As it so turned out, the story which she had invented happened to tally very much with the actual circumstances of the case, but it would have been awkward if Milroy had chanced to have suddenly come upon the scene, and she had been confronted with the brother of her imaginary friend. In the case of two

lovers nothing was more probable than that they might be together at the very moment of her visit, in which case her story would require to have been essentially different.

Mary presently returned with a photograph of Edward Milroy, which she showed to Ida, who inspected it narrowly. The features were certainly those of Mr. De Vaux, although there was a considerable difference in the costumes of the two pictures. Ida placed the two side by side, and the nicest observation could detect no distinction between the two faces, the resemblance extending even to the length of the hair and whiskers—in short, it seemed perfectly evident that both were likenesses of the same man. Ida was staggered, and felt the deepest misgivings that De Vaux had been playing her false, and that it was he, and no other, who was De Burgh's successful rival in the affections of the girl before her. However, she disguised her

emotion and spoke to Mary with perfect calmness, as though she was merely making inquiries in the interest of her friend.

"Mr. Milroy, you say, was the name he was known by," said Ida. "Did anything lead you to suppose that this name was assumed?"

"Oh! dear no. I trusted implicitly to every word which he uttered, although I had cause afterwards to regret this," replied Mary, sadly.

"Indeed; I am sorry for that. Then you began, after a time, to suspect something was wrong?"

"As long as he was with me I never dreamt of anything being wrong, but when, without the slightest hint or warning, he suddenly disappeared for ever, I then had misgivings and suspicions."

"Pray may I ask, without seeming to require too much information, when you last saw this Mr. Milroy?"

"It must be nine or ten months now

since Edward was last in this house," replied Mary, "and, from that hour to this, I have never heard either from him or about him."

"You will not misunderstand me, Miss Forester, when I say that I presume he paid his addresses to you, and this naturally led you to think his conduct the more remarkable? Of course all that passes between us is in the strictest and most honourable confidence."

"I quite understand you," replied Mary, with heightening colour, as Ida alluded to Milroy's intentions. "Mr. Milroy professed his love for me, and I believed him. Indeed there was such a mystery in his sudden disappearance, that I often think he may have met with some accident, only now, I fear, that I see the explanation of his conduct."

"Did you never notice anything in his behaviour or manner of an eccentric or peculiar nature? Was he not subject to fits

of melancholy and depression of spirits, and very absent at times in his way of talking?"

"Now that you mention it, I may have observed an occasional wildness in his look, as though something weighed upon his mind," replied Mary. These words sent a sharp pang through Ida's bosom, for they so exactly expressed what she knew to be actually the case as regarded De Vaux. That wildness of aspect had frequently startled her, and she knew well that he had some terrible secret which hung like a load upon his brain.

"I suppose," continued Ida, "he did not speak much about his relations?"

"That was one thing in him which I particularly noticed. He always seemed very unwilling to talk about his family, and when I once put the question, told me he was an orphan and had lived by himself for many years. I understood that he supported himself by literature, or something of that sort, but there seemed to me always to be a high-bred

air and style about him, as though he had once mixed in the upper ranks of life," said Mary, little aware how deeply her words sank into Ida's breast.

"It is a very strange affair altogether," said the latter; "but I think you will now feel rather thankful that matters had not proceeded further between you and Mr. Milroy. You mentioned that he had not written to you since you parted, and I suppose he was never seen in this neighbourhood again?"

"He was only known to one or two persons in the village, because he had been so short a time here, but I have not heard that he has been seen in this part of the country since."

"His conduct is the more remarkable," observed Ida, "as I understand that he had been paying his addresses to a lady before he last left his home. I fear that he was one of those men who make love indiscriminately, merely for the purpose of passing an idle hour."

"There I cannot agree with you," said Mary, warmly, resenting this slighting reference to the man she had once idolized. "Whatever may have been his faults, I will not believe that Edward Milroy was capable of professing love for one woman, while his heart was given to another."

"Ah, Miss Forester, you will be fortunate if you never meet such men in the world! I fear it is the way with too many of them, but, in this case, we must remember that the person of whom we are talking could scarcely be considered responsible for his actions."

"I have lived so little in the world," said Mary, "that I scarcely know the ways of those in it, and from what you say, there is little to be gained by learning them."

"I can easily understand that, living in this pretty cottage, you enjoy the pleasures of a social home circle of friends, and the excitement and bustle of a London season would probably soon pall upon you," said

Ida, who readily perceived that she was talking to a girl who had seen nothing of the gaiety and dissipation of town life.

"You are quite right," replied Mary; "and here I shall remain, living and dying a plain country girl."

"I must not keep you any longer, Miss Forester," said Ida, seeing that there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the interview, and accordingly she rose to take her departure. "Allow me to return my best thanks for the information you have given me."

"You are very welcome to it all," replied Mary; "but I am afraid that the little I have been able to tell, will not be of much assistance to your friend. One thing I should like to ask you, and it is, that if poor Edward should ever return home, you would be kind enough to let me know, for I have all along thought that some fatal accident has happened to him."

"Certainly, I shall do so," said Ida; "the moment I know anything definite about him you shall hear of it."

With these words she bowed to Mary, and in a few moments more had entered the carriage which waited for her at the door, telling the coachman to drive to the railway station. Their interview had scarcely lasted more than a quarter of an hour, but poor Mary might well have wished that it had never taken place. Involuntarily she had been led to doubt the solemn protestations of the man who had borne away her heart's best affections, unless she put the more charitable construction upon his conduct, that he was not to be held responsible for his actions! This was but a chilling consolation after all, and she would much rather have preferred to remain in uncertainty as to her former lover's fate, than to have so dark a shadow thrown on his memory. True it was that she had ceased to think of him, but her belief in the honour and purity of

Edward Milroy had hitherto been to a great extent unshaken. Now it had received a rude shock, and the inevitable conclusion seemed to be that she had been grossly deceived. She remembered now, what in her previous agitation had passed unnoticed, that her visitor never mentioned her name. Not that any doubt of the truth of the latter's statement ever crossed Mary's mind, for being incapable of practising any deceit herself, she gave full credit to every one else being actuated by the same motives. Besides which, Ida's story tallied very closely with the actual facts of the case, and her appearance and conversation were those of a person who moved in the upper circles of society. Neither did the latter disclose Milroy's proper name, but her reticence upon this subject Mary could readily understand, and she had too much delicacy to press the question, when she noticed that Ida seemed unwilling to answer it. It was very unfortunate that, after Mary had begun to

forget the occasion of her first sorrow, and was endeavouring to repay the devotion of a man of sterling worth, her mind should be distracted by a recurrence to the great grief of her life.

Ida, too, had gained but little by her visit to Mary Forester. What information she gathered was of the most meagre description, and Mr. De Burgh's story had been corroborated in almost every particular; indeed, so many circumstances which Mary mentioned seemed to point to the conclusion that Aubrey De Vaux and Milroy were one and the same person, that Ida was forced into the belief of her suspicions being correct. Nothing was more probable than that he had accidentally met Mary during the visit to the West of England, which had occurred on the occasion of their yacht voyage to Russia, and, determined to gratify a sudden whim, he had passed himself off in the manner described. Satiated with the nauseous flattery of those

in his own rank of life, his wayward fancy would delight in the contemplation of so much freshness and innocence as were displayed in the girl from whom Ida had just parted. The novelty of the situation had charmed him, and he had the additional zest of encountering and vanquishing a rival to render his triumph more sweet. It was easy for such a consummate actor to pass off as some literary recluse, preferring the quiet of a picturesque village to the din and bustle of a great city. Reckless of the consequences, he no doubt breathed into Mary's ear eloquent protestations of love, and the simple girl had readily been captivated. Small consolation was it to Ida that the former was so soon abandoned, for it only proved the utter heartlessness of the man, and how miserably she, too, had been imposed upon by his seducing tongue. She, also, who had watched his conduct and studied his character for years, whose nice sense of observation had been developed

under such favourable auspices, to be so easily deluded! Pshaw! it was out of the question. She was torturing her mind with unreal chimeras of the brain, and fretting herself into belief in startling incidents which were morally and physically impossible. If she were convinced of the identity of Milroy and De Vaux, then it followed that the latter must be actually in this country, whereas she knew him to be thousands of miles away! But then came into view the marvellous event which happened that night in the library at Delmaine Court. How was that to be accounted for? Into which ever channel her thoughts turned, the way seemed beset with doubts and difficulties, until Ida fervently wished that the events of her whole past life could be blotted out.

These disquieting surmises filled Ida's mind during her journey back to Delmaine Court, and she resolved to endeavour to induce her father to quit Mr. De Vaux's

house for ever, and settle in a home of their own, where she might hope that, with an entire change of scene, the bitterness of her sorrow might imperceptibly pass away.

CHAPTER II.

"You are surely unusually quiet to-day, dearest," said Mr. Massey to Mary, after they had been conversing for some little time, on the evening of the day on which the latter had seen Ida. "Tell me what can I do to cheer you up?"

"I will tell you what it is, Wilfred; but you must not be displeased at my touching upon a painful subject."

"Of course I will not," said the curate, wondering what was coming; "as if I could be displeased at anything you say."

"This morning, then, I was surprised by Jane telling me that a strange lady wished to see me, and upon going into the parlour I found a young and handsome woman sit-

ting there, who said that she had something particular to communicate. It was about Edward Milroy that she wished to speak, and she had come to see me out of kindness to some intimate friend of hers."

Here Mary detailed the circumstances of Ida's visit, to which Mr. Massey listened with great interest.

"It is certainly a curious story," he said, when she had finished; "but there seems every probability that it was the same person whom you knew. What name did the lady give when she introduced herself?"

"She gave none at all; but it was done so quietly and naturally that I never noticed this till she was gone. But she was really a distinguished-looking person, and besides she showed me a photograph of Mr. Milroy, proving that he was truly the brother of her friend."

"It seems a little odd that she gave no name herself, but I can easily understand

that she might not care to divulge that of the gentleman. Did you notice in Milroy the singularity of appearance, and wildness of manner of which she spoke?"

"Not much, although I now fancy that I can account for some peculiarities in his behaviour, which at the time struck me but lightly," said Mary.

"At any rate, it places his conduct to you, upon one hypothesis, in a different and more favourable light," observed Mr. Massey; "but it can do no good to recur to the old feelings which you say you have well-nigh forgotten. God forbid that I should say a word against any man, much less the unfortunate person of whom we have been speaking."

"Since I have accepted your love, Wilfred, dear, I have striven to prove myself worthy of the confidence you place in me; but it is only natural that I should feel interested in the fate of this unhappy young man. I would willingly believe him innocent of

the apparent baseness of which he was guilty, in offering me the love which he owed to another."

"I will ask Dr. Farebrother what he thought of him, because he is a very acute observer, and I think he mentioned that he knew Mr. Milroy. I mean to call upon the doctor to-morrow, for you know, dearest, how anxious I am for his good report about you."

Mary said nothing, but only smiled, although there was a shade of ineffable sadness in her smile whenever Mr. Massey spoke of their approaching union. They talked on about many things until the time came when the curate generally took his departure, and he wistfully bade Mary adieu for the night. Poor girl! her feelings had that day received a sad shock, and a presentiment of coming sorrow troubled her mind. The blithesome sensations of buoyant happiness, natural to girls of her age, she had long ceased to experience, and

a leaden feeling of depression continuously preyed upon her spirits.

Upon the morrow Massey, according to his promise, proceeded to the residence of Doctor Farebrother, whom he found at home. The doctor received his visitor with the greatest cordiality, as he really had much esteem for the kind-hearted curate.

"Very happy to see you, Mr. Massey," said the former; "I only wish that you would look me up a little oftener."

"Thank you very much, doctor, but you know how constantly my time is occupied. One must attend to duty before pleasure, although I am afraid I hardly always act up to this maxim."

"I should like to ask your lady parishioners their opinion," said the doctor, smiling, "and I rather imagine that you would come triumphantly out of the ordeal."

"Do you know, it is about one of them that I wish to speak to you?" said Mr.

Massey, faintly blushing, as he observed the doctor's eyes fixed upon his with a sly expression. "Miss Forester, your interesting patient—what do you think of her condition?"

"Ah! poor girl—she is not as well as I would like to see her," said the doctor, unwilling to state how precarious he knew Mary's condition to be. "She is a sweet, gentle girl, and I believe there is no one who knows her that does not love her."

"Doctor, I wish to tell you a secret—although, indeed, all my friends will soon know it—I love Mary Forester deeply, and she has consented to become my wife."

"My dear Massey, I knew the state of your feelings long ago, merely from my own observation, and I can well understand how much you love her. Her character is without a blemish, and in disposition she is an angel."

Massey sat in raptures at hearing these enthusiastic praises of the idol of his heart;

and those who have been in a similar position will readily understand his sensations.

"Indeed, doctor, every word that you have uttered is true. Mary's is a pure and perfect character, and I long impatiently for the happy hour when I can call her my own."

Doctor Farebrother slightly turned his head and looked out of the window, for it pained him to think that it must soon be his duty to bear very sad tidings to his young visitor. This action of the doctor's was unobserved by the latter, who continued—

"What I want to ask you is, when do you think she will be strong enough to move to the new house which I am going to take and furnish, because, of course, at our marriage she would require to quit the cottage where she is now living?"

The doctor was really at a loss what to say, for it was a terribly thankless office to

have to disclose the bitter truth to her lover. And yet, if he suffered him to go on in ignorance of Mary's most dangerous state, the blow would be all the more cruel when it actually came. The practised eye of the medical man clearly detected those fatal symptoms which escaped even the affectionate scrutiny of a watchful relative, and his experience too surely told him that a rapid change for the worse was at hand.

"My dear Massey!" he said, in a soothing tone, "you are aware that Mary is not strong, and I think she herself has told you of her own misgivings regarding her health."

"Oh! yes; she has occasionally talked in a desponding tone, but long confinement to the house has put gloomy ideas into her head, which fresh air and a change of scene will soon dispel."

"Ah! my good young friend, you are

too sanguine. Now, I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but I must in duty tell you that I feel considerable apprehensions about Miss Forester's present state."

"Oh! Doctor Farebrother, do not say this," said Massey, in accents tremulous with agitation. "There is nothing in her appearance, surely, which warrants your entertaining these gloomy forebodings. She looks pale at times, certainly, and has an occasional cough, but there is always some colour in her cheeks, and her eye is as bright as ever."

"This is true enough," replied the doctor, "but you must be aware that her particular complaint is often veiled by very deceptive symptoms. But I am wrong in alarming you too much; let us wait till the summer is a little further advanced, and there is no saying what improvement may take place." These last words he uttered because he really commiserated the unhappy

young clergyman, whose face presented a picture of despair.

"I am sure she is not so bad as this," he said, eagerly catching at the ray of comfort contained in the doctor's last expression; "but you must promise to let me know the moment you observe any unfavourable change in her."

"You may certainly reckon upon my doing this," said the doctor, earnestly; "only, you must not tell Miss Forester what has passed between us, for a great deal depends upon her mind being kept as easy as possible."

"Well, she knows that I was going to speak to you about herself, and I am afraid that she will be certain to ask me what took place. What can I say if she does?"

"Just tell her that I gave general answers to your questions, and talked about the impossibility of expressing an opinion at present. I daresay you will

not have much difficulty in putting her off."

"I shall do my best, but I confess that your words have awakened very painful ideas in my mind," said the young man, despondingly.

"Come, this will never do," observed the doctor, kindly; "you must cheer up, and hope for the best."

"Oh! by-the-bye," said Mr. Massey, recollecting that he was to inquire about Milroy, "I want to ask you if you remember a Mr. Milroy who lived in the village for a short time last year?"

"Perfectly well," replied the other, who was upon the point of adding that he had seen Milroy within the last few days, but, after a moment's reflection, thought it better not to mention this.

"What sort of a person did you think he was, because there appears to have been some mystery about him?"

"I knew very little of him, and really

had very few opportunities of judging, but I should certainly say that he was a gentleman."

"The reason why I ask is, because some curious revelations have come to light regarding him. You are aware that he was a visitor at Mrs. Forester's cottage and saw a good deal of Mary—in fact, he went the length of paying his addresses to her. Well, yesterday she was surprised by receiving a visit from a lady, who stated that she was an intimate friend of his sister, and gave a very different account of him from what Mary had hitherto supposed to be true."

Mr. Massey accordingly narrated the substance of what he had heard from Mary, and Doctor Farebrother listened to the story with the greatest attention.

"It is a singular story," he said, when the curate had finished, "and I hardly know what to make of it. Does it not seem curious that a lady, such as she is described

to be, should come unattended, in that mysterious fashion, to discuss so delicate a matter with a set of total strangers?"

"That is precisely what struck me at first, but her story was a likely enough one, and she could have no possible motive for inventing it, one would imagine."

"Exactly, that is what I think," said the doctor, musing; "only one never can tell the reasons for some people's actions. It must have been rather trying for Mary Forester to recur to circumstances which she probably wished to forget."

"Did you notice any peculiarity of manner in Milroy?" said the curate; "as a medical man, you must be the most competent judge to pronounce upon this point."

Doctor Farebrother had certain suspicions of his own, which, however, he did not at present think it prudent to express, and replied to the other's question in vague terms.

"As I said before, I knew Mr. Milroy but

slightly, and he seemed a reserved sort of person. He certainly made a sudden and very mysterious disappearance from this neighbourhood."

"Well, you know we have no particular cause to trouble ourselves at all about him, only Mary wished me to mention the subject to you. The lady promised to let her know if anything further was heard about Milroy, and, till then, the matter can rest."

"Will you tell Miss Forester that I intend to call upon her to-morrow, and then she will probably mention it herself?" said the doctor.

"That I shall, and I hope you may be able to report favourably of her condition, for I shall be in tortures of suspense until I hear something encouraging from you," said Mr. Massey, rising.

"You must not give way to these sort of feelings, my good friend, but always assume your gayest and most cheerful manner while

in her presence; particularly remember this."

"I shall do my best. Good-bye for the present, Doctor Farebrother," said the curate, as he shook hands with the former.

When Mr. Massey had gone, the doctor remained for some time sunk in deep reflection. He was not very much surprised at what he had heard concerning Milroy, because there was a mystery about the latter which he could never fathom. During the last interview they had together, Milroy had again alluded to some secret which he had to impart, and the doctor now rather regretted that he adopted the tone he did towards his visitor. Still, if what he had just heard from Massey was really the case, this was probably the explanation of the whole matter, and would account for various apparently inexplicable incidents which had taken place. It seemed strange that Milroy's relatives should be able to find no trace of

him, when he went about the country so openly as he must recently have done; but the doctor was pretty confident that it would not be very long before he should learn something more definite upon the subject.

CHAPTER III.

Since Ida's return to Delmaine Court after the visit to Mary Forester, she had endeavoured to prevent her thoughts from recurring to the subject which unfortunately lay nearest her heart, by occupying her time as much as possible in reading, writing, working, and different domestic duties. She rarely stirred beyond the immediate precincts of the mansion and gardens, which latter were of sufficient size to afford ample walking exercise. Still there were many things which met her eyes, at every turn, that continually reminded her of De Vaux, and it seemed certain that, as long as she lived at any of his residences, this must always be the case.

Nowhere were there so many associations connected with his image as in the library, and unfortunately this was the apartment of all others in which she loved to sit. In spite of the mysterious tradition which hung over the room, and the remarkable incident which had occurred to herself so recently in it, Ida passed hours every day in the library. There was a still and solemn air about the lofty chamber, with its rich stained glass bow window, and heavy dark oak panelling, which harmonized with the present tone of her mind. As the morning sun slanted in, with softened radiance, through the emblazoned panes, its rays lit up the elaborate carved work of the book-shelves, disclosing the literary treasures which rested behind the massive brass-work that partially screened them from observation. Two marble busts of ancient Greek philosophers occupied each corner of the room opposite the door, and the beautifully sculptured mantel-piece was of itself a complete study. Great taste had

been displayed in the decorations of the walls and ceiling, which last was of solid oak, embossed and inlaid with numerous heraldic devices richly coloured and gilded. As the visitor reclined in an easy-chair, with his feet resting upon the softest of Turkey carpets, and cast his eye around, it was impossible to picture any more complete and luxurious sanctuary for a devotee of the Muses.

In this chamber Ida was sitting one forenoon, with a book in her hand, which she had been reading for more than an hour; opposite to her was the large picture of Mr. De Vaux, which we have before-mentioned, and upon this her eye would involuntarily rest, as she paused in her reading to meditate on some passage. A sunbeam at this moment fell upon the face of the portrait, giving it a wonderfully life-like appearance, and the dark eyes seemed to look lovingly at Ida. It was a noble countenance, full of latent power, and with a wonderful subtlety

of expression, and she gazed upon it with softened feelings. Where was he now? To what scenes of turmoil and danger might his restless spirit be hurrying Aubrey De Vaux? With a gentle sigh, she once more bent her eyes over the volume in her hand.

The sound of carriage-wheels, crushing the gravel in front of the portico, was now faintly heard by Ida through the closed doors. This was an unusual occurrence so early in the day, especially as but few visitors were in the habit of calling at Delmaine Court, Mr. De Vaux being so little known in the neighbourhood, and Ida wondered who it could be. A loud pealing of the bell followed, and presently voices were heard, though very indistinctly, as there were two doors, one of which was closed, between the library and the entrance hall. Imagining that it was some person wishing to see her father, Ida resumed her reading, but had not proceeded more than a

few lines when the door was opened, and some one entered the room. She looked up and beheld Aubrey De Vaux! There was no mistaking him this time. He stood before her in palpable form and substance, and the sunbeam played upon his countenance in the same manner that it fell upon his portrait a few minutes since. Her surprise was so great that she uttered not a word, and the book fell from her hand to the floor.

"Why, Ida, have you no smile of welcome for me?" said De Vaux, in a slightly reproachful tone.

There was no doubt it was *his* voice that Ida now heard, for in her bewilderment the memory of the figure she had seen at the dead of night, almost on that very spot, vividly recurred to her.

"Aubrey, is it indeed you?" she said, faintly. "You take me so much by surprise that I am almost inclined to doubt my senses."

"Did you not receive my last letter, in which I told you that I had altered my plans, and intended to return home immediately?" he asked.

"No, I have received no such letter; on the contrary, in your last you spoke about various plans of travel which you were projecting."

"Ah, I see how it is. The letter announcing my return has gone round by Southampton, instead of coming direct from Marseilles across France; there is always a week or ten days' difference in the mails."

"Then have you just arrived in this country?" said Ida, wishing to know if it were possible that it was really De Vaux who appeared to her that night.

"Well, not very long ago—that is to say, a week or two; but I had a great deal to do in London, or I should have been here sooner. But how is your father; and I hope you, too, have been well?" said Mr.

De Vaux, who seemed to Ida to evade her question a little.

"Thank you, we are both pretty well; and how have you been?" replied Ida, looking earnestly at De Vaux. "Judging by the tone of that short additional note enclosed in your last letter to me, I should imagine you had been suffering from low spirits."

"So I was at the time, although I dare-say you were a little puzzled to reconcile the apparent variance between the sentiments I expressed in the two letters. I had occupied the greater part of one lovely sunny forenoon in the Hills by writing the long, cheerful letter, describing my mode of life. It was a morning of peculiar brilliance, and the delicious breeze from the distant Himalayas animated every languid invalid with its elastic force; but in the afternoon a complete change took place, and towards nightfall there was a terrific storm of wind, thunder, and lightning. You know how

absurdly susceptible I am, at times, to be influenced by atmospheric changes, and late that night I got thinking about home, and my lonely, wandering life, until I suppose I grew weak and sentimental, the result of which was that I scribbled off some gloomy and dismal lines. But never mind, let us forget all this nonsense, and think of nothing but pleasure, dearest Ida."

While Aubrey was speaking, Ida considered whether she should tell him about the vision, or apparition, which had appeared to her on the night she received his letter, and as nothing would be gained by concealing it, and her father was sure to mention the strange incident, it seemed best to acquaint him with the story.

"I don't see that there is any particular nonsense in your being disturbed by the feelings of which you speak, for I should imagine that when a person is many thousand miles from his own country, and surrounded by unsympathizing strangers,

these are precisely the sensations he would experience," said Ida, quietly.

"Exactly, I understand the sort of thing; you are still inclined to be a little sententious, Ida, but I wont listen to anything doleful just now. I want pleasure, excitement, any amount of gaiety. In a few days the house will be crammed full of company, I have been sending out invitations right and left, and mean to give a ball immediately which will throw my grand one at St. Petersburgh completely in the shade."

Aubrey talked in rapid, excited tones as he walked up and down the library, and Ida remarked a degree of wildness in his eye greater than she had ever noticed before. It seemed to her that his glance once or twice wandered towards the particular panel in the wall against which the mysterious figure of himself stood that night, but this might be mere fancy on her part.

"You seem in very high spirits to-day," she replied; "but before we go any further

I want to tell you of a very curious circumstance which happened to me the other day."

"I am all attention, and expect to hear something very exciting," exclaimed De Vaux, with a forced laugh.

"Of course, you remember the tradition connected with this room, and the remarkable apparition which was seen by an ancestress of yours the evening of the day on which her husband was shot?"

"Oh yes! I know all about that, but I must confess to being always very sceptical as to the truth of the story. Who ever knew an old baronial house without its ghost? and the library is invariably the room fixed upon as his shadowship's domicile, unless, indeed, there happens to be a tapestried chamber, or a blue bedroom which has not been occupied for years, to accommodate the mysterious shade? But go on, I must apologize for interrupting you."

"I used to think that you were rather a believer in such warnings; but no matter, I

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will let you hear my story. I had occasion to come into this room late one night, after midnight, in fact, for a book which I wanted to read, and most assuredly I saw either you or your ghost, or some one the exact double of you, after I had been in the library not many minutes."

While Ida was speaking, Aubrey averted his eyes from her, and his fingers seemed to twitch convulsively, his demeanour being that of a man very ill at ease. She watched him keenly, and marked his rising embarrassment.

"And how long ago was this, may I ask, because I suppose it betokens something very terrible which is going to happen to me?" said Aubrey, with a laboured attempt at gaiety.

"It was the very night of the day on which I received that letter of yours, so full of strange forebodings. I was sitting at this table, with the light in front of me, reading Gray's poems, when I heard a slight

noise, and looking up, there I saw you standing, with an old book bound with two clasps in your hand, right opposite to me, just at that panel," said Ida, pointing towards the part of the wall she indicated.

"Oh! nonsense, Ida! you must have fallen asleep and dreamt all this, probably aided a good deal by the associations of the spot, and by thinking over the letter you received that day from me."

"It was no dream, I assure you," said Ida, quietly but decidedly; "I think I see you at this very moment, as you stood there clasping that book to your side."

"What sort of a book was this; it seems odd that you should have noticed it so particularly?"

"It looked like an old Bible, handsomely bound, and the gold clasps were unusually massive."

"Well, I must compliment you upon your courage, because you must have kept tolerably cool to observe all this."

"For a little I retained all my faculties as clear as possible, and you gazed at me with a singularly fixed expression, and, after a few seconds, slowly raised your arm towards the portrait of yourself over the fireplace. This gesture seemed to break the spell which bound me, for I then gave a loud scream, and swooned away."

"I admit that it is a capital specimen of a ghost story, Ida, and the incidents were decidedly dramatic, but you must excuse me if I stick to my belief that you fell asleep in the easy-chair and dreamt it all."

"Of course, you may think as you please about my story, but I ought to mention that it was a very sultry night, and the library window had, by some accident, been left open."

"Then my double was not an impalpable, compressible shade, dissolving like Pepper's ghost, but a substantial fellow, to whom a bolted window would be a decided obstacle," said Aubrey, with a laugh.

"Do you know, Aubrey that a very curious idea more than once occurred to me," answered Ida, composedly, "that the apparition was none other than your own self, in flesh and blood, and that the whole affair was a grim, practical joke."

"But how could that be?" said De Vaux, sharply; "why, I had not arrived in this country then."

"Oh yes, I think you had. The two letters came by Southampton, and you know 'the heavy portion of the mails,' as the newspapers always call it, is often considerably delayed, so that there would be ample time for you to get to England, by Marseilles and across France, a fortnight in advance of your own letter. I am tolerably familiar with the intricacies of Indian mails, from having a friend in the North West Presidency, with whom I occasionally correspond. But of course I am only joking, because I know you would never have stooped to such a wretched artifice as this."

Ida now was sorry that she had said this, because, for whatever reason, her words seemed to produce a very marked effect upon De Vaux. He rose up from the chair in which he was sitting, and walked uneasily to the window, as if he did not wish to encounter her searching glance. When he spoke again his voice was husky and tremulous, though he affected an air of almost flippant levity.

"Ha, ha!—I must say this is a capital idea, that I should effect a burglarious entrance into my own house and carry off a fusty old book as a memorial of my visit! Are you quite sure that my pockets did not bulge out, as if the spoons and forks were stowed away there? No; come—that's rather vulgar: I don't think I should go in for anything less than jewellery. A few diamond rings and a pearl necklace or two might have been worth my while. Ha, ha! —do you know it is the best joke I have heard of for a long time! I tell you what,

Ida, I shall offer a reward for my own apprehension at once. Let me see—how does this read?" said De Vaux, with a wild laugh, as, sitting down at the table and dashing open a writing portfolio, he took out a sheet of paper and scribbled on it as follows—

"One Hundred Guineas Reward.

"Whereas, on or about the night of the 20th of May, one Aubrey De Vaux did wickedly and feloniously steal, abstract, or otherwise make off with, an old book, and divers other articles of immense value, from the mansion-house of Delmaine Court, the property of the said Aubrey De Vaux;—Notice is hereby given, that the above reward will be instantaneously paid to any person, or persons, who may give such information as shall lead to the apprehension of the said Aubrey De Vaux, or his aiders and abettors in this most heinous crime."

"There, now, Ida," he continued, "can you improve upon this?"

While he was speaking Ida watched him with melancholy interest, and a strange feeling of pity moved her for the man who could make such a wreck of a magnificent position and splendid career, as most assuredly had been done by Aubrey De Vaux. With all his rare talents and immense advantages, he had trifled his whole existence away, and, were he to die that very day, his name would indeed be "writ in water." And yet there was so much fascination about the man withal, that this cool and clever woman, who had apparently received almost certain proofs of his deep treachery towards her, and had long brooded over her wrongs, became, whenever he was present, by degrees softened, forgiving, and loving! There was still a doubt as to whether De Vaux and Milroy were one and the same, and to this doubt she fondly clung. Her heart once more yearned towards Aubrey, and if he would only confide in her, and lay open the secrets of his breast, how very

soon would every wayward caprice and tormenting slight be effaced from her memory!

"Come, Aubrey, let us pass on to more pleasant subjects," said Ida, gently laying her hand upon his arm. "You know that I do not wish to spoil the happiness of this unexpected meeting, and we must leave all ghost stories till Christmas time. Papa will be so pleased to see you, and indeed you can't tell how dull the house seems without you."

"Ah! there my own Ida speaks like her old dear self," exclaimed Aubrey, apparently with an air of relief, and a smile brightened his lips such as Ida had rarely seen there. "Now, come, tell me all about yourself, and what you have been doing since you left St. Petersburgh."

"Oh! we will talk of this after dinner, when we are all three together; although, indeed, I have very little to say more than you know already. I am so anxious for

papa to see you, I will run and find him," said Ida, rising.

"The servant told me that he went out riding about an hour ago, so that he can't be back yet, I should think; I am as anxious as you are to see him, because I wish to tell him about the arrangements for receiving all the guests I expect."

As Aubrey said this he noticed that Ida's cheek flushed, and there was an unmistakable glance of pride in the look which she gave him. With the intuitive delicacy of feeling which always characterized this singular man, in certain respects, where moral principles were not concerned, he at once saw his error. He was invariably most scrupulous in treating the baron as his *friend*, not his mere agent or adviser; and this fine trait of character had often been marked by Ida. As regarded herself, Aubrey always addressed his friend's daughter with the same air and manner that he paid his devoir to the proudest

scion of the peerage. It might appear that he simply desired to see the baron to communicate his wishes concerning the visitors who would soon arrive at the Court, but this impression was at once removed by what followed.

"You see, Ida," he continued, "I am as restless as ever; and I want to tell your father that, as he has not been very well lately, he must consider himself one of my most favoured *guests*, and leave everything to me."

"This is most considerate of you," said Ida, whose face now brightened with a glow of pleasure; "but papa is perfectly well now. It was just the faintest touch of gout, his old enemy you may remember, which kept him a few days in the house."

"Never mind; he must let me do all the hard work, and I mean to entertain on rather a grand scale, because I shall be off to America in a very short time. As they all say in this neighbourhood that they

never see me, I shall show myself to the best of my very humble advantage."

A pang passed through Ida's breast as she heard this, for she augured no good from this ceaseless wandering and inquietude. Yet why should she care whether he remained here or not—what hope was there left to her now?

"I should have thought that you were tired of travelling," she said; "but, indeed, one always reads that a passion for constant change, once indulged in, only grows stronger and stronger. You have drank Nile water, have you not?" she added, with a smile.

"I must see Niagara, after having paid due court to the other wonders of the world, you know; but I positively shall settle down in a year or two, and become a model country gentleman. In the meantime I shall wash the dust off my face, and join you and the baron at luncheon," said Aubrey, quitting the library.

Ida's whole thoughts were now turned into a new channel and became more unsettled than ever. She seemed gradually to succumb to her fate, which appeared every day to become inevitably bound up with that of Aubrey De Vaux.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days after Mr. Massey's visit to Doctor Farebrother, the latter was one afternoon sitting in his study when a visitor was announced,—Mr. Lawrence. This was the name which, it will be remembered, Eustace De Burgh assumed when he was an inmate of the doctor's house, because he had, for obvious reasons, never told the former of his real birth and condition. They had not met since De Burgh had parted from his kind medical adviser, cured of the desperate wound which had been inflicted by his own hand. He had once or twice written to the doctor expressing the gratitude which he really felt, and always intended to call upon him at the first favourable opportunity. On

this occasion he happened to be staying at a country house not far off, and resolved to make out his long-deferred visit.

"Good morning, Mr. Lawrence," said the doctor, holding out his hand; "it is some time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you. I am glad to see you looking so well."

"I am very well, thank you, doctor, and since we last met, I have travelled to a good many places, St. Petersburgh among the rest. However, I am glad to find myself once more back in the old country."

"Ah! that is generally the case with you travellers; 'there is no place like home' is still the burden of your song."

"Indeed it is very true; some people are constrained to lead a life of excitement and constant change, not only to drown *ennui*, but, too often, care as well."

"Nothing can be more certain than this," replied the doctor, a little wondering what was his visitor's object in making this allu-

sion. "I intend to make the grand tour again myself, when I can find time."

"Without further preface I must tell you what I really came here for," replied De Burgh, "although it is a painful subject to touch upon. You remember the whole incident connected with your first making my acquaintance."

"Very well, indeed, and an excellent recovery you made; I wish all my patients did as well."

"Then you can understand how that mysterious occurrence still haunts my memory, but I hope in time to clear the enigma up. Meanwhile I wish to tell you that I have found, as I fancy, some clue to it. But first you must promise that you will consider as strictly confidential anything which I may now mention."

The doctor simply bowed gravely, and said nothing, whereupon De Burgh proceeded.

"After leaving the shelter of your hospi-

table roof I travelled abroad from one place to another, and finally settled for a season in one of the capital cities of Europe. While I was there, a fellow-countryman, reported to be enormously wealthy, also came to reside in the same city, and in a short time he became famous, from the splendour of his entertainments and other causes. We met very soon afterwards at a mutual friend's house, and judge of my surprise, when he turned out to be—as from the extraordinary similarity of features and voice I made certain was the case—none other than Edward Milroy! Of course I was thunderstruck, and I distinctly remember noticing that he was a good deal moved also when we met face to face. Under the circumstances, I thought the best thing I could do was frankly to own who I was, and offer any reparation in my power for the crime which, in a moment of insanity and frenzy, I had once committed."

Here the young man's voice trembled,

and he walked to the other end of the room to conceal his agitation. The doctor, seeing this, considerately rang the bell and ordered the servant to bring some wine, this interruption giving De Burgh time to recover himself.

"I accordingly called upon this gentleman," he continued, to explain who I was, and to ask his forgiveness, as well as to thank him for all that he had done, but found that I was completely mistaken in supposing him to be Milroy! Before in any way committing myself, I ascertained this, and of course turned off the awkwardness of my mistake in the best manner I could. Still, the resemblance between the two was such an astonishing one—the voices, peculiar air, features—all were so exactly similar that, to this day, I feel certain that some mysterious connexion exists between the two men, if indeed they are not identical. Ah! Doctor Farebrother, you little know the bitter disappointment it was to me.

For months and months I had been praying that I might be relieved from my doubts, and have an opportunity of proving my gratitude to my generous deliverer, and, at the most unexpected moment, my hopes seemed to be realized. But it was not to be, and once more I was thrown back to my former state of wretchedness. Can you aid me in any way, or are your lips still sealed, as you told me formerly that they were, upon this subject?"

Doctor Farebrother felt himself in a position of some perplexity. On the one hand he could once more raise De Burgh's hopes by telling him that he had been visited by Milroy only a few days previously, but, on the other, he had reasons of his own for not letting this be known. He resolved, for the present, to say nothing about Milroy's recent visit, and rather to evade giving a direct reply to De Burgh's question.

"I feel for you, Mr. Lawrence," he said; "but I may so far say that, in my opinion,

you give yourself unnecessary cause for uneasiness. The subject is undoubtedly a painful one for all concerned, but I believe," he added, significantly, "that the time is not far distant when everything will be cleared up."

"Thank you sincerely for your kindly sympathy," answered De Burgh; "but there is another question I would ask you," he continued, in slightly faltering tones. "Mary Forester, poor girl, how is she?"

"I am sorry to say she is very ill—dangerously so, I fear."

"Do you know, I was almost afraid of this, Dr. Farebrother, for I remember what a sensitive mind she had; and the trouble she must have come through was probably too much for her."

"There can be little doubt of that," remarked the doctor, "and if you could see her now, you would notice a woeful change in the once bright and happy girl."

"You see her, of course, occasionally?"

said the other, with an air of keen interest. "Does she ever speak of bygone days?"

"Yes, she did formerly, but latterly, I am glad to say, she has had other matters to think of. Probably you do not know that she is actually engaged to be married to the village curate—a man whom any woman might be proud to love."

"No, I have had no opportunity of hearing about her for a long time. Well, I am glad that she is so fortunate as to meet with an eligible match. I presume from this that she heard nothing further of Milroy?" said De Burgh, eagerly.

"Not exactly. This much I can tell you, however, that she heard certain particulars regarding him not very long ago, which would seem to prove that he could not have been in the position in life that he himself represented."

"Indeed! and may I ask you what this was that she learned about him?" inquired De Burgh, with increasing interest.

"I can tell you a little, without violating any confidence," replied the doctor; "but I may as well say that I am not in a position to vouch for the truth of the story which was told to Miss Forester. It was simply this—that Mr. Milroy is the heir to a considerable property; that he is supposed to be subject to fits of aberration of mind, from the natural melancholy of his disposition; that at such periods he leaves his home, and wanders away, his friends cannot tell where; that about the time he must have come to this village he had actually so disappeared, and since then had never been seen by his relatives, who consequently are in great anxiety regarding him. Now, all this I give you simply as I heard it from one whose word I can undoubtedly rely upon."

"Will you think me too pertinacious if I inquire how it was that Miss Forester learned these particulars?" asked Mr. De Burgh, after a little hesitation.

"Not at all, because I did not hear that any particular secresy was enjoined upon Miss Forester by the lady in question. Who she was Miss Forester does not know, for, oddly enough, when she called upon her one forenoon she gave no name to the servant, and it did not occur to the former to inquire who her visitor was. The lady was young, beautiful, and very handsomely dressed, and stated that she came to make these inquiries about Milroy on behalf of his sister, her own particular friend. She gave the particulars regarding him which I have just mentioned, and wished to know from Miss Forester whether she had ever heard from him since they parted, or could tell where he now was."

A light seemed to break in upon De Burgh as he listened to the description of Miss Forester's visitor.

"Did the lady speak with a very faint foreign accent, and had she remarkably

fine and expressive eyes?" he inquired, eagerly.

"Ah, now you go rather too fast for me," said the doctor, smiling; "the description of the unknown lady was sufficiently enticing without the additional piquancy of the slight foreign accent and highly expressive eyes."

"I will tell you why I ask this," replied De Burgh. "During the time that the rich Englishman, of whom I spoke, lived in the city where I was, among his guests were a foreign nobleman and his daughter who exactly answers to the description of the lady who called upon Miss Forester. But more particularly I recall this fact, because the lady in question was one day looking through my carte-de-visite album, and shortly afterwards she inquired, with some interest apparently, who that plainly-dressed, simple-looking girl was, meaning Mary Forester. Now, it is certainly strange that, amongst the very large

number of likenesses of lady friends scattered throughout my album, she should have fixed upon this one alone. I remember, too, that she once or twice made rather a point of asking about that portrait, as if it was a subject of special interest to her. When you take this into consideration, and the fact of her being the guest of the man I could have sworn was Edward Milroy, there seems to me to be a singular train of connexion between these two and Mary Forester."

Dr. Farebrother appeared to be of the same way of thinking also, because he leant his head upon one hand in a musing attitude, and did not speak for a little time.

"Yes," at length he said, "I see a good deal of force in what you say; the whole circumstances of the case are very curious, and I confess that I am a good deal interested in it. You did not mention the name of the gentleman to whom you allude.

Do you feel at liberty to tell me who he was?"

"After what has passed between us, doctor, and remembering how much I owe to your care and skill, I feel that I ought to have no secrets from you. Actuated by motives which you can well understand, I have hitherto refrained from giving you my real name, for Lawrence I need hardly tell you is an assumed one; but at no very distant date you shall know all. This alone prevents me from mentioning who the person is that I mistook for Edward Milroy."

"My dear sir," said Doctor Farebrother, "pray do not give yourself any concern upon this account. I can very well restrain my curiosity, for I confess that I am a good deal interested in this case, until the proper time comes, when the mystery will be cleared up. Do you remain long in this neighbourhood?"

"I daresay I shall be here for a few

weeks more at least, but I am staying at a friend's house, some twenty or thirty miles from this ; rather out of your district. Will you kindly let me know how Mary Forester goes on ?—I take a deep interest in her still. Here is my address," said De Burgh, writing it upon a slip of paper, which he handed to the doctor.

"Yes ; but shall I write under cover to Mr. Lawrence ? I am afraid that my letter would be returned," said the doctor, smiling.

"Ah ! true, I forgot," answered De Burgh, a little confused ; "well, I shall have the pleasure of calling again upon you in a short time. Good-bye, for the present," he continued, warmly grasping the doctor's hand.

"Good-bye ; I shall look forward to seeing you again before very long."

And so De Burgh departed, leaving the doctor still more puzzled than ever to account for certain events which had recently occurred.

CHAPTER V.

A RAPID change for the worse took place in the condition of Mary Forester, soon after the conversation between Wilfred Massey and Doctor Farebrother, recorded in a former chapter. The most casual observer could now detect the fatal presence of that deadly ailment, whose approach is so stealthy, but sure, and which veils the withering blight it imperceptibly instils into the system under a beautiful but deceitful bloom. In the gentlest and most considerate manner, the doctor had warned her of the dangerous symptoms which were rapidly developing themselves, but indeed Mary too surely felt within herself that her young life was soon doomed to be cut short.

It was a sad and painful duty to communicate the distressing intelligence to Mr. Massey, but the doctor did so in a manner which was full of thoughtful delicacy of feeling. The former received the news with a burst of grief, which was only natural in the case of one who loved so fervently and so well, but the severity of the blow was a little mitigated, inasmuch that, latterly, he had himself begun to notice a visible alteration in Mary's appearance. Still it was terrible to think that before very long, one so pure, so beautiful, and so beloved, must inevitably pass away, and that the sweet girl, whose gentle and loving disposition had won his heart, would be seen no more. There is an agony and intensity of sorrow in such a thought as this, which transcends even the bitterness of affliction that pervades the mind when all is over, for then, indeed, "Won is the glory, and the grief is past." But who can see unmoved the closing days of a dying girl, calmly awaiting the moment

when her spirit will wing its way to Him who gave it, even although the mind may strive to comfort itself with the idea that the change is a happy one, from the bed of sickness and sorrow to the glorious mansions of everlasting life? This blessed consolation is lost sight of in the tumultuous grief of the moment, when we see the treasure that we prize so dearly, gradually fading away from our gaze, and the dull, grinding consciousness is forced upon us of the desolate blank which has fallen upon our affections. As the dying sufferer's last sigh is wafted from the threshold of another world, then, indeed, the cold gloom of the tomb seems to deaden all our faculties; but the last bitter struggle is over, and the mind is relaxed from its extreme tension of anguish. Then comes the sweet hope of an eternal re-union, when all the loved ones shall be gathered together, never more to part, and the withered flowers which strew the narrow

grave shall be woven into garlands of immortal beauty.

It was a bright summer morning, and so warm that at Mary's request the windows of the room were opened. She lay upon the sofa, enjoying the soft air which passed into the apartment, and her eyes looked wistfully at the green, waving boughs, and each light, vapoury cloud which danced across the blue sky. That very morning Massey had met Doctor Farebrother, as they both were on their way to the cottage, and the latter considered it a favourable opportunity to break the sad intelligence to the young curate that there was now no hope. They were walking through the woods by a comparatively unfrequented path, so that there was no one to observe the bitter tears which Massey could not restrain, and, for a while, his fortitude completely gave way. This the doctor had expected, but it was far better that the worst should be told at once, for he well knew that Mary Forester

was beyond the reach of earthly skill. The most that could now be done was to mitigate, as much as possible, the severity of the brief period of suffering which must necessarily ensue, and to avoid all topics which would recall any sad memories of by-gone days. After a while it was arranged that the doctor should go on first to see his patient, and when he rejoined Mr. Massey, the latter would learn how Mary had received the fatal intelligence.

When he saw the open windows, Doctor Farebrother judged that she must be a little better than usual, because this was a rather early hour for her being dressed and on the sofa. He entered her room with a gentle step, fearing that he might disturb her, if by chance she had fallen asleep. She turned her head instantly, and welcomed her visitor with a smile.

"Good morning, Miss Forester," said the doctor, "I am glad to see you up and enjoying the pleasant, sunny air; are you sure

that the open window is not too much for you?"

"Oh! no, doctor; I hope you will not order it to be shut down for a little. I had some refreshing sleep last night, and this morning I do actually feel a little stronger."

"That's right, only you must not over-exert yourself. Not much reading, too, remember," he added, glancing at a religious book which Mary had apparently been recently perusing.

"May I not be allowed to read just a very little, dear Doctor Farebrother? You know how fond of books I always was."

"I had much rather that some one read to you occasionally, because this is not at all fatiguing or trying, provided you are quite free from headache at the time. However, we can arrange about this afterwards."

"Thank you so much for all your kind attention; you do not know how grateful I feel!"

"Yes, I do, indeed, Miss Forester; but I

am only performing a duty which I am bound to render to all alike who need my advice. Have you much appetite now in the morning?"

"No; I cannot say that I have. I enjoy those nice preserved fruits which Mr. Massey brings me often, but I confess I cannot manage anything very substantial."

"I hope that you take all the wine regularly which I prescribed, because this is one great means of preserving your strength. I don't like to hear of that languid feeling of which you spoke the other day, and I ought not to disguise the fact that I do not see the improvement in your condition which I hoped might take place."

"Doctor Farebrother," said Mary, earnestly, fixing her eyes upon his with a touching expression, "I know that you are incapable of practising any deceit upon me, and I wish to ask you a solemn question: I never concealed from you that I thought

this would be my last illness, and I should like to know the truth from your own lips at once. Do not hesitate to tell me, because I am quite prepared for the worst."

The doctor could not answer at first, being unprepared for this sudden appeal, and intending to break the news to her very delicately. However, he knew the nature of the girl before him, and how true it was that she was quite prepared for the worst; therefore he thought it much better not to gloss over the real nature of her danger.

"As long as there is strength left there is hope, Miss Forester," he replied; "and, with your originally good constitution, it may be some little time before your health completely gives way; but it is as well that you should understand that, at any moment, this delusive vigour may fail, and dangerous symptoms set in."

"Thank you, doctor, for so kindly letting me know exactly how I am. But you need

not be afraid of telling me anything now, for I have endeavoured to make my peace with God, and only await patiently the hour when it shall please Him to release me," said Mary, with an earnest and resigned devotion of tone which was touching in the extreme. The doctor was visibly affected, even accustomed as he was to scenes of this painful nature, and walked to the window to conceal his agitation.

"Ah! Miss Forester," he said, endeavouring to hide his emotion, "I wish we were all in such a fit state of preparation to quit this world as you seem to be."

"You give me more praise than I deserve; but it is due to my good aunt and to Mr. Massey that my mind is so tranquil under the trials which I have to go through. Oh! Doctor Farebrother, it is very, very sad to see how wistfully both of them seem to look at me now, just as if they felt sure that I am going away from them for ever."

"Now, my dear Miss Forester, we must not dwell too long upon this sad topic, for it is absolutely necessary that you be kept as cheerful as possible. Your words remind me, however, that I met Mr. Massey on my way here, and he is now waiting anxiously to see you. Now, if I let him come in, you must promise me not to allow him to remain more than an hour."

"Very well, doctor, as you please; I shall obey your instructions most carefully."

"Good-bye, then, for this day. Now, remember! take plenty of wine and eat as well as you can," said the doctor, gently pressing Mary's hand.

When he saw Massey again, the latter's first question was whether he had told Mary how ill she really was?

"Yes, Massey, I did, but indeed she seemed to be perfectly aware of this herself; I never saw any one receive the announcement so calmly."

"Dear girl! she has such a resigned and sweet disposition that she is almost too good for this world. Oh! doctor, what a prize—what a pearl of inestimable price —I have lost!" said Massey, deeply moved.

"Come, my good fellow, do not give way so;—it is no trifling with your feelings to say that as long as there is life there is hope."

"You are very good, doctor; and I know that, if mortal skill could avail her anything, she would owe her life to your unwearied attention. May I see her now, do you think?"

"Yes; but you must promise me not to remain very long, because she has necessarily been a good deal agitated this morning."

"I promise faithfully that I shall stay only a very short time. Shall we see you to-morrow?"

"Most certainly. I intend to call and

see how she goes on every day now," said the doctor, as he parted with Massey.

The latter now knocked lightly at the door of the room in which Mary lay; and, as he did so, he felt his heart beating violently. A gentle voice said, "Come in," and the next moment the lovers were together. Massey felt a choking sensation in the throat as he saw the thin wasted form lying on the sofa, and he could not utter a word. The recollection of what the doctor had mentioned of her calm resignation completely unmanned him, and he durst not trust himself to speak. Bending over the sufferer, he convulsively pressed her hand, and a gush of acute sorrow suffused his eyes with tears. And who, with a soul to feel, could have been moved otherwise? Here lay before him, with her life-stream only too evidently fast ebbing away, one whom to know was to love, and whom he adored with the fervour of a most tender and sensitive heart! Bitter, bitter

was it to have this precious jewel borne away by the cold hand of Death!

"How do you feel to-day, Mary?" he said, making a great effort to be calm, though his heart was almost bursting. "It is such a beautiful morning that you must enjoy the fresh air."

"I am pretty well, thank you, Wilfred. I should so like to have rambled through the woods with you on a day like this if I had been able," said Mary, casting her eyes longingly over the sunny landscape.

"Ah! how I wish that you were able even to stroll round the garden; but let us hope for better days to come."

Mary shook her head despondingly, but, remembering what Doctor Farebrother had enjoined, began to inquire about different matters in which she was interested.

"How do the school children come on, Wilfred? Are the numbers increasing? because, if they are, you will soon need help from the lady teachers."

"We are getting on famously, and I constantly get offers of assistance from different ladies in the congregation. Your little favourite, Ellen Redgrave, is making great progress, and she is such a well-behaved child."

"Yes, she is a sweet little thing; I should like to see her once more," said Mary, in tones which went to Massey's heart, they seemed to tell so clearly that she felt it would be the last time she should see the child. There is something in the words "once more," used in such a sense, which has a sadly ominous tone, and Massey could not refrain from expressing the feelings under which he laboured.

"Mary, do you really feel so ill as your manner and words would indicate? Do not give way too much, dearest! Remember Doctor Farebrother's injunctions to keep up your spirits."

"I shall do my best, but I have just told him that my mind is, I thank Heaven, pre-

pared for any change. Remember, Wilfred dear, that, from the very first, I told you what a presentiment of my coming fate I always felt, and I warned you from indulging in hopes which I feared would certainly turn out false."

"You did indeed, Mary, but I could not bear to think that one so young and so pure would be taken away in the flush of her early days. And even now, although the fresh glow of health is gone, there is nothing in your looks which would lead one to fear the worst."

"Ah! but you cannot tell what I feel," said Mary, solemnly, looking upwards with a touching expression of meekness and resignation in her eyes. "You must promise me not to grieve too much for my loss, Wilfred; I cannot bear the idea of your suffering, and I not being here to console you."

Mr. Massey was obliged to put his handkerchief to his eyes to conceal as much as

possible the emotion under which he laboured, and for some moments he could not trust himself to reply.

"You know only too well, Mary, that I shall never, never forget you; and I shudder to look forward to the desolate life which must be my portion when the worst takes place. And yet I shall always have the recollection of the precious moments which I have passed by your side to furnish food for sad contemplation. How true indeed are the exquisite words of Washington Irving, upon the subject of those griefs which the heart will always cherish, paradoxical though the idea seems at first."

"But if you come to look at it in another light, I am about to receive a happy release from a life of sickness and sorrow, and go to await our joyful meeting in that kingdom where pain and sadness can never enter. How quickly even the longest life upon earth passes away, and when your work is performed, and you are called to receive

your reward, what a consolation will it be to reflect that you have been labouring in such a glorious cause. But all this you know as well as I do, and can express in much better words."

"Yes, Mary, you do well to remind me how one can only bow meekly to the dispensations of a Higher Power, and I should be most grateful that hitherto I have been gifted with health and strength to enable me to perform the duties of my station. Still, with you by my side, what a happy lot would have been mine! I should have had one dear counsellor ever at hand to aid me with her sympathy and advice, and every beautiful scene through which I may pass, every moment of pleasure that I may hereafter experience, will but remind me of how their sweetness would be increased a thousandfold had you been by my side!"

"My own Wilfred! it is now my turn to say that you must not dwell too much upon this subject. Consider how young you are,

and how, with such talents, you must rise. Increased occupation is certain gradually to soften the keenness of grief, and after a time, Wilfred, you must seek out one who will make you a far better wife than ever I should, because a clergyman is much happier when married than living alone. You will do this for my sake I hope, dearest; say that you will," said Mary, earnestly, looking at her lover with an almost imploring expression of tenderness.

"Oh! Mary, Mary, do not talk in this way! How can I bear to hear you asking me to prove false to one to whom my first passionate vows of love were poured out! Can you really believe that I am capable of so much callousness of heart?"

"Wilfred, you misunderstand me," said Mary, calmly, and in her gentlest tones. "I should indeed be grieved that you should ever forget me, but I wish to point out how I think that your life may be rendered more happy and more useful. It is not good for

you to be alone, because you are so eager to fulfil all the duties of a clergyman's life that, if no one were at hand to watch you, health and strength would be sacrificed I fear. No one except a mother, or perhaps a sister, can exercise this tender care, unless it be a wife. I think you must allow, Wilfred, that I am right."

It was singular to hear the composed way in which Mary spoke upon so delicate a subject, and the unselfish manner in which she strove to promote her lover's happiness. But her character had acquired much greater solidity during the months that she had been confined to the house, partly from the books which Massey had lent her, and partly from the advantage which she derived from constant communication with a man of his sensible and well-informed mind. Irresistibly impressed, too, as she was, with the conviction that her end was near at hand, this thought only seemed to elevate and enlarge her ideas, in place of enfeebling

her mind by sorrowful anticipations of an early death. Having a blessed confidence in her Redeemer's mercy, and a fond hope that her prayers had been heard, she looked forward to the hour of her departure without any fear, and with a taint of sorrow caused only by remembering those whom she left behind. Still, it was only natural that Massey, ere the sun of his existence, as he deemed Mary to be, had set for ever, should shrink from the idea of allowing her image to fade away from his memory.

"You are most thoughtful and considerate, Mary," he said; "and I thoroughly understand the delicacy of your motives; but I cannot bear to hear you talk thus. Do you believe for a moment that I could allow any one to supplant your place in my recollections—to usurp the throne upon which I have placed the darling of my heart? It can do no good our dwelling upon this subject, and, dearest, I am sure that you will not pain me by mentioning it again."

Mary clearly saw he was in earnest, and that his feelings were hurt by the supposition that it could be imagined he would entertain such an idea, so she resolved to say no more.

"Well, Wilfred, it shall be as you wish; but you know that it was only my anxiety for your welfare which led me to say what I did."

Massey's only answer was to imprint a passionate kiss upon her lips, for he was unable to give utterance to all that he felt. He rose and walked to the window, endeavouring to recover himself; and, unwilling to excite Mary by prolonging their conversation too long, shortly afterwards bid her good-bye, promising to look in again that evening.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW days afterwards, as Mrs. Forester was proceeding through the wood on her way back from the village, she heard footsteps on the pathway immediately behind, and, turning round, was greatly astonished to find herself in the presence of Edward Milroy! There was no mistaking his identity, for he stood before her, calm, pale, and self-possessed as ever, and he met her indignant glance without flinching. Mrs. Forester's first impulse was to pass on without speaking, but, feeling certain that his presence here was not merely accidental, she resolved to question him.

"It is a long time since we have met, Mr. Milroy, and great changes have taken

place. What is your business here?" she said, sternly.

"I know what you must think of my conduct, Mrs. Forester, and I am prepared for your reproaches, but will you grant me one request, which is that I may be permitted to ask Miss Forester's forgiveness?" said Milroy, very quietly, but firmly.

"Would you wish again to disturb the peace of mind of my poor dying girl?" replied her aunt, indignantly, her eyes, at the same time, filling with tears.

"Dying! good God!—you don't say she is so bad as this?" exclaimed Milroy. "I had indeed heard that she was not well, but hoped that her youth would carry her through."

"I can tell you no more than what I have said; and you had better pray to Heaven to be forgiven, because you have much to answer for, after your behaviour to Mary."

"Oh, Mrs. Forester, you cannot tell all the agony of mind that I have suffered

lately; but you will not refuse me one last interview with Mary?"

"Mr. Milroy, do you wish to complete the work you have begun, by seeing the poor girl die before your eyes?"

"I am fully aware that my conduct seems utterly indefensible, but it is not so; and I only ask for a few farewell words with your niece. I promise it shall be the last time you will ever see me," said Milroy, earnestly.

"But I do not see what possible good can be done by your meeting her again. She has, thank Heaven, forgotten you, and if she lives, will one day become the wife of an excellent and truly Christian man; only of this, alas! there is no hope," added Mrs. Forester, with a fresh burst of sorrow.

"Do not refuse me this favour, I beseech you," said Milroy, in an imploring tone; "believe me, that you will never regret it."

"If I thought that the least good could come of it, I would gladly ask Mary to see

you, but I am afraid it would be very bad for her in her present weak state," replied Mrs. Forester, relenting a little as she perceived the emotion under which Milroy really laboured.

"Oh! dear Mrs. Forester, only grant me this request, and I swear to do anything in the world which you may require me," urged Milroy, seeing that the good woman was beginning to waver. Indeed, when she looked at his fine countenance, stamped as it was with an openness of expression which seemed to belie the apparent baseness of his conduct, Mrs. Forester was tempted to believe that he could not be quite so guilty, after all.

"Well, Mr. Milroy, I wish to do to others as I would be done by, and I cannot think that you will perjure yourself by telling Mary what is not the truth. But I must see whether she herself is willing to hear what you have to say."

"I thank you from the bottom of my

heart," said Milroy, fervently; "and I promise that I will make the interview as short as possible. May I go to the cottage with you now?"

"Very well, you can do so," said the other, walking along the pathway in front of Milroy. They proceeded in silence to the cottage, and when they arrived there, he waited in the parlour until Mrs. Forester had broken the intelligence of his visit to Mary. This required to be done judiciously, because in the poor girl's weak state of health, any sudden shock to her nerves was particularly dangerous.

"I think, my dear, you seem a little stronger to-day," said her aunt. "Has Mr. Massey been here yet?"

"No, he has not; it is generally later in the day when he comes."

"Has he ever said anything about Edward Milroy again?"

"No, we never mention his name now; I prefer to look upon him as one who is dead."

"That was certainly a curious story which the lady told you about him when she called on you."

"Yes, aunt; but what makes you think about him just now?—surely you have not been hearing any news of him?"

"You have guessed right, Mary; I have heard that he is alive and well," said Mrs. Forester.

Instantly the colour rose in her niece's face at these words, and it could be seen that her feelings were painfully excited.

"Alive and well, is he? But who has told you this,—is it Doctor Farebrother?" inquired Mary, eagerly.

"Not exactly; but the person who mentioned this said that Milroy was most anxious to see you."

"To see me!" exclaimed Mary; "surely he cannot know all that has taken place since we last met, or he could never wish to meet me again."

"But what do you say, Mary? Would

you be willing to have a meeting with him once more, or do you think that it would be too much for you?"

"I should like to see him before I die, dear aunt, if it were only to say that I forgive him for all the sorrow he has caused me. But where is he now, and when could we meet each other?"

"If you really wished it, I think it might be very soon; only, what do you suppose Doctor Farebrother and Mr. Massey would say?"

"Of course, I should tell them about it; —but how have you heard all this?" said Mary, fixing her eyes upon her aunt.

The latter looked slightly confused, and a light flashed across Mary's mind.

"Oh! aunt," she said, tremulous with excitement, "you surely have not seen him yourself?"

"Yes, I have, my child. Now, do keep calm, and I will tell you all about it."

Mrs. Forester now detailed the circum-

stances of her meeting with Milroy, and was pleased to observe that Mary grew calmer as she proceeded, although she was visibly affected by the announcement that he was actually in the room below, waiting to see her.

"And now, Mary," continued her aunt, "do you feel equal to the exertion of meeting him again? If it is to take place, I think the sooner it is over the better."

"You are right, aunt; I prefer to see him now, and then this will be off my mind," said Mary, who had greatly recovered her composure. She felt that, if the interview was postponed, her mind would inevitably be brooding over it, and she was anxious that no worldly cares should interfere with the peaceful preparation for that end which was, but too evidently, close at hand. It must be a painful scene, but it would soon be over; and she desired her aunt to tell Mr. Milroy that he might come into her presence.

When Mrs. Forester announced this to him, it was his turn to show an agitation which, indeed, it would have been most unnatural if he had not exhibited. However, he at once followed her to Mary's chamber, nerving himself for the interview as best he could.

The sick girl lay upon a sofa facing the window, and the bright sunlight was partially shaded by the blind, so that its rays might not dazzle her eyes. Her countenance, though wasted, still retained its peculiar sweetness of expression, and her eyes beamed with the same pure lustre that had first won Milroy's heart.

He entered the room with downcast eyes, and at first did not speak a word. When, however, he looked at her a second time, he was visibly startled to see the woeful change which had transformed the blooming girl he remembered so well into the wan figure before him. Mary's face flushed as she met his glance, but otherwise she manifested a

wonderful degree of calmness under a scene so trying.

"Your looks tell me plainly that you see how I am changed," she said, as Milroy seemed unable to speak.

"Oh! Miss Forester—Mary!" he exclaimed, in tones broken by emotion, "what can I say?"

"Edward Milroy, I forgive you!" said Mary, in a voice so soft and full of feeling that it had well-nigh unmanned him altogether. At the same time she extended her hand to him, which he took hold of as respectfully as though it had been that of a queen. The gentle pressure which he gave, Mary returned, in token that she accepted the evident contrition he displayed as perfectly sincere. Strangely enough, she was by far the more composed of the two, and there was a placid dignity in her demeanour which strongly impressed itself upon his notice.

"I have sought this interview," he said,

"because it is only due to you that I should, in some way, explain what I have done. At the same time, I fully confess that my conduct is open to the bitterest reproaches which can be heaped upon me."

"You shall not hear a word of reproach from my lips," replied Mary, with a sweetness that was very touching. "Your presence certainly brings back many scenes which have a most painful interest for me; but I had rather that we said as little as possible about the past."

"I shall do all that I can to spare your feelings, but it is absolutely necessary that I allude to some incidents which took place in those happy days," said Milroy.

"It was a great pity that you never wrote to me, Edward; if you had done this, many misconstructions regarding your conduct might have been removed. Now it is idle to indulge in vain regrets over bygone occurrences, and I tell you frankly that I

would rather say nothing about what has passed between us. I have long ago forgiven you for any wrong which you have done me."

"This is spoken like your own generous self, dear Mary; but I must be permitted to say a few words in my own defence, if you will so far bear with me," said Milroy, taking a letter from his pocket which was addressed to Miss Forester. "Perhaps it may be more agreeable to you," he continued, "not to hear my defence from my own lips, therefore I will ask you to read this letter at your leisure, and then, please, destroy it. I took the precaution of bringing it with me in case I might be unable to see you."

"I promise to do this," said Mary, taking the letter out of his hand; "and I am willing to believe that it entirely clears your character. I had a visit from a lady who is an intimate friend of your sister, and she explained a good deal of what

hitherto had appeared very incomprehensible."

"My sister's friend!" said Milroy, in evident astonishment; "why, I have no sister. Surely you must be mistaken."

"Oh! no, I am not," replied Mary, gently, supposing that he still intended to keep the circumstances of his life and position a secret; "but I daresay your letter will explain everything. Very probably you do not know all your sister's friends, therefore I need not describe the lady to you."

"But I say solemnly, Mary, that I have no sister. How did this person happen to know anything about my friendship with you; I never spoke to any lady upon the subject in my life?"

Although Mary was surprised to hear this, still she imagined that he was resolved to keep up his disguise. But, in truth, the curiosity which, in other circumstances, she would undoubtedly have felt upon this

matter, was completely extinguished by her desire to bury the past in oblivion. Her sole anxiety now was to dismiss from her mind all worldly considerations, and it mattered little to her whether Edward Milroy was a deceiver or not. She was done with him, and it was sufficient for him to know that he was forgiven for all the evil he had wrought.

"Let us say no more about this, Edward," said Mary, looking earnestly at him; "I shall read your letter afterwards, and that is sufficient for me. This is our last meeting upon earth, do not let us embitter it by unnecessary and painful details."

As Milroy gazed upon her pale face and heard her tremulous voice, he felt the full force of what she said, and resolved to allude to the subject no more.

"Is it indeed the last time that I shall see you?" he said, gazing wistfully at her.

"Yes, it must be so. Although the doctor does not tell me openly what he thinks, I

know from his manner that my death is not far off. Indeed he has himself prepared me for the worst, and I trust that my peace is made with Heaven."

"How calmly you talk of this," said Milroy, unable to repress the tears which he hastily brushed away. "Surely all hope is not lost?"

"No mortal hand can save me now, and I can only wish that, when your last hour comes, you may dread its approach as little as I do. I may be wrong, Edward, in thus meeting with you, because I am now the affianced bride of another, but I wish to take the opportunity of doing you what I believe is a good service. I once loved you as truly and fondly as ever woman did, and the time was, when I hung with rapture upon every word that came from your lips, treasuring up in my heart each passionate vow that you uttered. During the short time that our friendship lasted, I tasted to the fullest extent the sweets of a first love.

What followed, after you deserted me, you can well imagine, and I will not pain you by describing my sufferings. But by the memory of that early love, I beseech you to consider well the life you are now leading. Remember that, like me, you may be cut off in the prime of your youth, and, oh! Edward, let not the summons come when you are ill-prepared to obey it! Unless you are greatly changed, I fear that religious thoughts seldom, if ever, occur to you. You are drifting along without any right principles to guide you, and are but the slave of your own passions. Forgive me, Edward, for using these harsh expressions; you know well that it is only for your good that I say thus much. Compared with the blissful happiness of feeling that you can confidently rely upon your Redeemer's mercy, how insignificant are even the most passionate sensations of a mere earthly love! Take warning, I implore you, before it is yet too late, and if you value the last request of a

dying girl, promise me that you will pray, in all sincerity of heart, to be led into the paths of righteousness."

Mary could not restrain her emotion, as she thus earnestly pleaded with Milroy, and the tears rolled over her cheeks while she dwelt upon the necessity of his imploring the guidance of Heaven. It was most touching to witness the anxiety of the wronged and despised girl, to reclaim the man at whose hands she had received such bitter injury. Milroy, on his part, made no attempt to conceal the excess of his grief, but gave free vent to his sorrow and remorse.

"Oh! Mary," he said, in tones that indicated the sincerity of his promise, "I swear that I will do all this. But I have been so wicked from first to last, so selfish, thoughtless, and unscrupulous, that I can scarcely hope for pardon."

"Do not say this, Edward, for you know that even the worst of sinners can yet re-

pent, and be received into the Kingdom of Heaven. But do not put it off till the eleventh hour, and think to delay your salvation till some more convenient season. Lose not a moment in making atonement for your past life of wickedness."

"I am afraid that you are fatigued, Mary," said Milroy, observing that she lay back on the sofa as though overcome by weakness. In truth, the exertion had been too much for her enfeebled frame, and Milroy saw that the interview ought not to be further prolonged. It was a terrible thought that he must now bid her farewell for ever, but the last parting could no longer be delayed.

"Yes, I think I must ask you to leave me," said Mary, in a low voice. "I am glad that we met once more, and while I yet live, you shall be remembered in my prayers. You are not angry with me for what I have said?" she continued, looking at Milroy with an expression of singular sweetness.

"Angry! oh, Mary, surely you cannot

think so badly of me. I came here to-day, expecting, and fully deserving your reproaches, but instead of them, I hear only words of love from your lips."

"Let us hope then that this meeting may be the means of increasing your future happiness, and in after life, you will sometimes remember the words of poor Mary Forester. I must say good-bye now, Edward; give me your hand," she continued, laying his hand upon her own white and wasted palm. Milroy could not trust himself to say another word, lest he should break down altogether, but silently clasped her hands within his own. He gazed upon her thin face with intense emotion, dwelling upon each beloved feature for the last time.

"Kiss me, Edward," said Mary, after a pause, during which neither had spoken. He bent down and did as she requested. This seemed to relieve her a little, and she grew much calmer.

"I must go now, Mary," he said, rising;

" is there any last request you have to make ?"

" Yes, one. Promise me that you will pray to be saved."

" I promise solemnly that I will."

" Then, good-bye, Edward."

" Farewell, dearest Mary !" was all that he could utter ; and with one long, lingering look he tore himself away.

CHAPTER VII.

A DAY of unusual heat was followed by an evening oppressively warm; and Mary, who lay upon her sofa, begged that the window might be opened to admit some fresh air. Not a leaf or flower stirred in the heavy atmosphere, and only an occasional note was heard from some restless songster, as he flitted from bough to bough. A thick sultry haze hung over the face of Heaven, obscuring the glimmer of the evening star, and all nature seemed in that state of unnatural repose which is often the forerunner of a storm.

One week only had elapsed since Milroy took his farewell of Mary; and, even in that short period, a great change for the

worse had taken place in her condition. Doctor Farebrother did not now attempt to disguise from her that the end was rapidly approaching, but she received the announcement with the most perfect calmness. He had seen her that morning, and said that he should call back again at night, because her condition had become alarmingly weak. Mr. Massey had just come in, and was now sitting in the room with her, awaiting the doctor's visit. He remarked a singular expression in her eyes, partly of anxiety and partly of resignation, but her face wore an aspect of serenity and repose. She had been much distressed by constant attacks of coughing, which shook her wasted frame; but towards the evening these paroxysms almost entirely ceased. Massey watched her with the closest scrutiny, so as to note any minute change which might take place, for he felt an irresistible conviction in his mind that the last sad scene was near at hand. She had told him all about Milroy's

visit, and mentioned that he left a letter with her, giving explanations of his whole conduct, which, at his request, she communicated to no one. Indeed, Massey had no wish to be enlightened upon this point, for all minor considerations were lost sight of in the dreadful bereavement which he was about to sustain.

"Do you not think that the open window may be too much for you?" he said, as he complied with Mary's request.

"You can close it again in a few minutes," she replied, languidly; "but the room is oppressively hot."

"I am so afraid of bringing on another fit of coughing," he remarked, resuming his seat.

"Wilfred, why do you look at me so earnestly?" said Mary, after they had both been silent for a while. Massey was a little puzzled what to say, because he did not wish to alarm her by confessing why he gazed so wistfully at the face he should soon see no more.

"Ah! why need I ask this," she continued, without giving him time to reply, "when I know that it is because you see that I am dying."

"Do you feel very ill, Mary?" said Massey, who now longed anxiously for the doctor to appear.

"Yes, I do; my strength is leaving me fast. Come nearer to me, Wilfred, and promise that you will not leave me till all is over."

"My own Mary! I am here—and here I shall remain," said Massey, holding her hand within his own, and gently raising her head till it rested against his shoulder.

"Although I am leaving you and all that are dear to me on earth, still I feel perfectly happy, dear Wilfred. Do you know that I seem to hear sweet music;—stay, listen!—there it is again," said Mary, leaning slightly forward, as if to catch some sound more distinctly.

"It is only your fancy, dearest; I cannot hear anything," replied Massey, who noticed that her eyes had a wild, wandering look.

"What does she say, Mr. Massey?" said Mrs. Forester, who came into the room at that moment—"does she hear music? I must put down the window: the air is too much for her."

"Oh! no, dear aunt, do not shut out these sweet sounds—they remind me of my mother's voice when I was a little girl, and used to kneel before her and say my prayers. I am afraid I have not been so good to you as I ought, aunt; but you will forgive me, will you not?"

"My darling Mary! no daughter was ever so dutiful as you have been," said the good woman, weeping bitterly as she heard Mary's pathetic words.

"Well, I hope I never said anything unkind to those whom I knew and loved. I have had some very happy days here, and

you will think of me when I am gone. My little bird—you must take care of it, Wilfred, for my sake; remember always to feed it and give it water. Dear little dickey! I know you will not be forgotten; let me kiss it for the last time."

Massey, whose grief, too, was unrestrained, took down the cage in which the canary bird hopped about unconsciously on its perch, and placed it in Mary's lap. The bird knew its mistress, and when she put her hand into the cage, at once lighted on her finger. She gently raised it to her face and pressed the soft, warm plumage to her lips.

"Good-bye, sweet little pet! Mary is going away, but you shall be taken care of."

The little thing twittered, exactly as though it understood what she said, and nestled in her bosom. After a while she replaced it in the cage, which was hung up in front of the window, as before.

Presently the doctor came in, and the moment he saw Mary his countenance fell, although he strove to conceal his apprehensions from the sufferer. He was surprised to see what a change had occurred since the morning, and was convinced, in his own mind that she had not many hours to live. In a few minutes he beckoned to Massey and Mrs. Forester to leave the room, because he felt it his duty to prepare Mary for the worst.

"Miss Forester," he said, with faltering tones, "one of the most painful duties which falls to a physician's lot I must now fulfil, for I have to warn you that human skill cannot much further prōlong your life!"

"Is it, then, so near?" she answered. "Well, I am quite ready; but first let me thank you for all that you have done for me."

"Oh! this is not worth mentioning. Would to God that I could have saved your life!"

"Heaven will reward you for all your kindness, I fervently hope. Do you think that I have many hours to live, doctor?"

"It is impossible for me to say; but if you have anything to tell your aunt or Mr. Massey it had better be done quickly," said the doctor, opening the door, and summoning them both into the room.

"Ah! you have come to take farewell of me," exclaimed Mary, as they came close to the sofa on which she lay. "Do not grieve so much, for we shall all meet again in the bright kingdom above! Dear Wilfred, I should have done my best to make you a good wife, but I hope that many happy days are yet in store for you."

"Oh! Mary, my heart will break—I cannot bear this!" said Massey, in tones that denoted the anguish he felt.

"Remember that I am only leaving you for a short time, Wilfred. I fondly trust in my Saviour's mercy,—and I seem to see the angels waiting to bear me away! You

will sometimes walk to those spots we used to love, where the green leaves shaded the flowers I was so fond of, and that path by the old oak-tree where you first whispered your love. I should like you to cherish these memories of our happy days gone by."

"So I shall, dearest!—not a stone or bush that we have looked upon together is forgotten by me."

"I was sure of that; and you will bury me in that part of the churchyard which is shaded by the large elm—it is such a quiet, retired spot."

"Everything shall be done exactly as you wish it," answered Massey, struggling to bear up against the emotion which shook his frame.

"I should like to see Ellen once more, to bid her good-bye," said Mary, suddenly; "she was always a good, affectionate girl."

Doctor Farebrother immediately called

the servant, who no sooner saw her young mistress than she burst into tears.

"Do not cry, Ellen," said Mary, gently; "I am going away from you, trusting that I shall be saved. Always read your Bible, Ellen, and look there when you are in sorrow and trouble. Here is a brooch that I used once to be proud of;—you will keep it as a memento of me, I am sure."

"You had better be moved from the sofa now, Miss Forester—it is quite time," said the doctor, motioning to her aunt and the servant, who gently laid her upon the bed. She lay there still and silent for a while, and her golden hair, unconfined by any band, streamed over her thin neck and shoulders. Her eyes rolled restlessly about with a vague dreamy expression, and at times she said a few words which showed that her mind was wandering. Doctor Farebrother very kindly remained, for he knew that she could not live through the night, and he was anxious to be at hand

when the final struggle took place. Massey and he were now in the parlour, where the tea-things were spread upon the table, but neither of them felt inclined to eat. Mrs. Forester was in the bedroom watching Mary, who appeared to have fallen into a sort of doze, and not a sound was heard throughout the house.

Shortly after this, Mrs. Forester's voice was heard faintly calling the doctor to come and see Mary. Immediately they both rose and proceeded to the bedroom where the sick girl lay. The noise of their entrance disturbed her, and her glance was instantly directed towards the door. When she saw Massey, a smile of exquisite sweetness crossed her lips, and her eyes beamed with an almost Heavenly expression of love. She raised her hand slightly for him to take hold of it, and when he did so, its gentle pressure sent a thrill through his frame. But, alas! it was moist with the dew of approaching death, and the light of life but

feebly flickered in its socket. Her eyes by turns rested upon each of those who stood by the bedside, and the glance seemed to convey the assurance that she died in the peaceful hope of soon awaking again to everlasting life. She now strove to speak, but her weakness was so great that her voice died away into a soft whisper.

"Wilfred," she faintly murmured, "I am dying; give me one last kiss!"

Massey threw himself upon the bed and passionately kissed her marble brow, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Forester did the same.

"Ah! now I see again the angels with palms in their hands, beckoning to me!" she whispered; "Jesus, my Saviour, I am ready!"

Her lips now closed, and an expression of celestial beauty stole gradually over her features and lit up the fast glazing eyes. The last moment of unutterable agony for those who wept round the dying girl had

now come, and the fast declining rays of life were barely visible above the horizon. That smile of ineffable loveliness still illumined her eyes and lingered upon her lips; but, in a few brief moments, all was over, and the spirit of the gentle girl had winged its way to Him who gave it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. De Vaux had issued invitations to a distinguished party of guests whom he expected to assemble in a few days at Delmaine Court. Since his return he lived in complete seclusion, and had scarcely left the precincts of his own grounds, except upon one occasion, when he was absent the entire day and did not return till late at night. Ida scarcely ever saw him before dinner, but his evenings were generally spent in the drawing-room, and he seemed to take as much delight as ever in her society. No further allusion had ever been made by either of them to the subject of the mysterious figure in the library.

The only invitation which Aubrey had

accepted since his return was to a dinner-party at Lord Mount Vernon's, the Lord Lieutenant of the county. This nobleman was most deservedly popular, and his magnificent mansion was famed for its princely hospitality. It was not alone the titled and highly born magnates of the land who were to be found here, but eminence and integrity in any of the walks of life were sure to be represented. Among those who were invited on the same occasion as Mr. De Vaux was Doctor Farebrother, who had several times officiated as his lordship's medical adviser.

The greatest curiosity was manifested amongst the assembled guests when it was understood that Mr. De Vaux had accepted his invitation. He was so little known in the county, although such exaggerated stories of his wealth and eccentricity were current, that a positive flutter of expectation was visible, even in that array of impassive and supercilious fashionable beauties. When

his name was announced every eyeglass was levelled at Mr. De Vaux, who knew very well the sensation which his presence created, but assumed an air of studied unconsciousness. He never appeared to greater advantage externally than upon this occasion. There was a shade of deep-seated melancholy upon his features, but his dark eyes flashed brilliantly as he glanced easily around. Lord Mount Vernon welcomed him with the greatest cordiality, and hoped that he at length intended to make himself known in the county where he held such extensive estates.

Aubrey was nearly the last guest to arrive, but Doctor Farebrother, who had to travel from a considerable distance, came after him. When his name was announced Aubrey turned sharply round and looked at the doctor, and a close observer might have noticed that his cheek slightly flushed. After the former had paid his respects to the noble host and hostess, he fell back

among the gentlemen, with several of whom he was personally acquainted. At length his glance fell upon Aubrey, and he, too, started with an air of visible surprise.

"Milroy here!" he thought within himself; "this is a most singular meeting. I was certain, however, that he was a man who moved in high life. I wonder if he will choose to recognise me."

"Can you tell me the name of that gentleman talking to Lady Blanche Egerton?" he asked the friend with whom he was conversing.

"Why that is the great lion, Mr. De Vaux," was the reply.

"Mr. De Vaux!" echoed the doctor, in amazement; "well, it is a most astonishing resemblance."

"Ah! I suppose he is like some one that you know," said the other.

"Yes, singularly so," replied the doctor.

Shortly after this, dinner was served, and it so happened that the doctor was seated

next but one to De Vaux, who handed Lady Blanche Egerton to table. The latter was a haughty beauty in her second season, with superb black eyes, raven locks, and a neck and shoulders which would have sent any man of ordinary sensibilities into ecstacies, but had no effect upon the inscrutable gentleman who sat by her side. Knowing his reputation for talent, Lady Blanche exerted herself to the utmost to produce an impression, by talking in an elevated strain, and professing the greatest horror of anything ordinary and unromantic. She was ready at a moment's notice to plunge into the mysteries of demonology, mesmerism, electro-biology, or any other uncommon topic which might be presumed to interest her imperturbable companion. But he would persist in being excessively commonplace, and seemed to take a delight in thwarting her attempts to be heroic and profound.

"Don't you love sitting up late at night

and reading poetry, Mr De Vaux? I am sure you are just the person to read Byron by moonlight."

"Really, Lady Blanche, you give me credit for literary tastes which I do not deserve. I make a point of always being in bed by ten o'clock."

"Indeed! you surprise me. Surely that intellectual pallor of yours must have been acquired over the 'midnight oil?'"

"On the contrary, I never could read a book. I am ashamed to say that the 'Gardeners' Chronicle,' the 'Agricultural Gazette,' and Bell's Life,' are about the only works I can manage to get through."

"Well, I should not have thought that you took an interest in farming matters. I always imagine agriculturists to be immense fat men, who look as if they fed upon 'Thorley's food for cattle,' and always wear top boots and drab coats with brass buttons," remarked Lady Blanche.

"I daresay now, you would not believe

that I regularly go to the dairy when the cows are milked, after which, I go round the fields to see how the ploughmen are getting on, and then ride over to market."

Lady Blanche elevated her eyebrows, and looked at Mr. De Vaux suspiciously, to see if he was quizzing her, but there was not a vestige of a smile on his imperturbable countenance.

"Then the world certainly has formed a wrong estimate of your character," remarked the lady, a good deal puzzled. "I am sure of one thing, however, that you are fond of music."

"Now, Lady Blanche, that is a most unlucky guess, for I declare to you that I do not know a jig tune from 'God save the Queen,' and if ever I go to the opera, I sleep the whole time."

"How very singular! But surely you must have some refined tastes! Painting, for instance, probably you are fond of pictures?"

"Not I indeed; I never by any chance enter my picture-gallery, and as for your old masters, and modern pre-Raphaelites, I would not exchange the coloured engravings of 'The fight between Heenan and Sayers,' and Colonel Townley's prize cow, 'Queen of Beauty,' which hang in my bedroom, for a whole cartload of Raphaels, Murillos, and Millais."

"Am I wrong again? Well, you have the most singular tastes of any one I ever met with; at any rate you are a connoisseur in wines and cookery?"

"Wine I can't bear, and invariably drink London stout when I am alone, unless I vary the beverage by gin-and-water, which I really like. As for cookery, in my opinion there is no dinner in the world equal to a good beef-steak pudding, with plenty of onions in it. I am obliged to keep a French *chef*, in deference to the prejudices of society, but Sally, my cook-maid, knows my tastes and invariably dresses my dinner. I

always breakfast off beef-steaks and porter at eight o'clock, and half-past two is my dinner hour when I am alone."

"Well, I shall only hazard one other conjecture," said Lady Blanche, in despair; "at least you are fond of ladies' society?"

"Now, you must not think me rude, Lady Blanche, if I confess to you that I always feel the greatest awkwardness and restraint when ladies are present. I am sure to catch myself picking my teeth, yawning, swinging my legs, whistling, or committing some other vulgarity, and, for a real evening's enjoyment, commend me to a snug dinner at my friend Farmer Chawbacon's, and a good romp afterwards in the barn at blind-man's buff, or hide-and-seek with his fat, good-natured, chubby-cheeked daughters, one of whom, in my opinion, is the finest girl in all the country side."

This last sally was too much for Lady Blanche, who forthwith turned to the gentleman on her other side, inwardly convinced

that of all the vulgar, boorish, and unsociable men whom she had ever encountered, Mr. De Vaux was certainly the worst. He was pleased to see how completely he had disgusted the fashionable beauty, and shortly afterwards commenced a very pleasant conversation with the lady next him.

When the ladies rose to adjourn to the drawing-room, of course Doctor Farebrother and Mr. De Vaux were brought together, and the doctor wondered whether the latter would recognise him. For during dinner he had several times closely scanned Aubrey's features, and the more he looked, the more he was convinced that Milroy and De Vaux were one and the same person. The resemblance was too striking to be merely accidental, and voice, eyes, hair, manner, all exactly corresponded. Besides there was nothing very remarkable in the fact of a man in De Vaux's exalted position having a *liaison* with an artless and beautiful girl, such as Mary Forester was, and he could

very well understand why he chose to go under a fictitious name. Still there was the story told by the lady who visited Mary to be got over, and also the fact that Mr. De Burgh had actually been told by De Vaux that he had never seen him before. What could be his motive in denying his identity, more especially as he had simply, in some thoughtless moment, made love to a pretty girl and then deserted her ? This was bad enough, but how many men were there who would have stopped short with merely winning Mary's heart? In short, the doctor was completely at fault, and resolved to allow any recognition to come first from Mr. De Vaux.

"Doctor Farebrother, I believe," said Aubrey, with a courteous inclination of his head as he closed up; "I have already heard of your reputation, although I am such a stranger in this neighbourhood."

"I may certainly return the compliment,

Mr. De Vaux. We have all heard of your talents and accomplishments."

"People are really very good in giving me such a flattering character, and I am afraid I shall find it difficult to realize their anticipations."

"Well, it is sometimes embarrassing to have too good a reputation, but it is not often that the world errs upon the side of charity. You have recently been a great traveller, I believe?" said the doctor.

"Yes; I have led rather a vagrant life for the last twelve or fourteen months, and have skimmed across Russia, Tartary, China, India, and so home."

"A year is certainly rather too short a time to devote to such an extended tour, but still a traveller, who merely wishes to glance at the salient features of different countries, can see a great deal in twelve months."

"Were you travelling merely for pleasure, or was health the object of your search?"

"Both motives, I may say, actuated me.

I felt a little out of sorts and wanted some change."

"There is nothing like moving about, if any one is suffering from depression of spirits or grief, say, from the loss of some near relative. I believe half the cases of mental aberration might be traced to the patient being confined to one scene and routine of life, at a time when he was labouring under some intense sorrow or strain upon the mind."

"I am thoroughly of your opinion, Doctor Farebrother. Do you know, I am rather curious upon this subject, and to me it has always been one of intense interest? The study is a profound one, because it leads one insensibly into the mazes of psychological research."

"It becomes rather bewildering, however, unless you start with some clearly-defined theory which you wish to work out, and certainly yields fewer practical results than any other investigation. That is my objection

to it from a non-professional point of view."

"Do you believe, doctor, that a man, we will suppose of refinement, and with a moderate degree of talent, could lead what I might almost call two separate existences? For instance, that he should one week mix in all fashionable dissipations of May-fair, and the next, enter with as much zest into the pleasures of a purely pastoral life?"

"To a certain extent I believe this might be possible enough; but I don't think that these sudden transitions from one extreme to the other could be relished very long. The ideas and affections, after a time, are sure to run in one groove, and when the mind had acquired a certain bent, this rebound from excessive excitement to perfect quiet would be felt unnatural and distasteful. I think the worst possible consequences would ensue if any one gave himself up to habits of this sort, and depend upon it, such spasmodic fluctuations indi-

cate anything but a healthy temperament."

"Well, you ought to know, because you speak from great experience, and I only approach the subject as an humble amateur," said Mr. De Vaux.

"Of course, grief from natural causes is a healthy emotion, and is sustained as such, being very different from that morbid state of feeling engendered by a sickly and diseased imagination brooding over fancied wrongs or unreal chimeras of the brain. Some natures are more excitable than others, and, even if they have had full time to prepare for the stern dispensation of fate, yet when the shock comes they are utterly unable to bear up against it. I had a striking instance of that yesterday. In my neighbourhood there is a young clergyman who was passionately attached to a beautiful girl, whose heart he had won. Unfortunately, she had been for months labouring under a fatal disease, and of this, latterly,

he was fully aware. Well, a week ago this girl died," said the doctor, with a solemn air, closely eyeing Mr. De Vaux, whose face was as calm as ever, "and her lover is in a pitiable state of prostration of mind and body. It is a very sad tale, but all the parties being perfect strangers to you, of course you can hardly appreciate the force of my illustration."

The doctor had purposely brought in the circumstances of Mary Forester's death to see if De Vaux would betray any emotion, or show any change of countenance, that would throw a light upon the mystery which enveloped Milroy's identity. He now noticed that the former seemed slightly to quail under the searching scrutiny to which he was subjected, for he turned his eyes away and busied himself with a dish of grapes to conceal his embarrassment. It was evident that he did not wish to pursue the subject further, and his reply was given with a confused, hesitating air.

"Ah! poor fellow, I daresay it is very hard for him to suffer such a loss. I see Lord Mount Vernon has rung for coffee. In case I have not another opportunity, let me hope that I may have the pleasure of seeing you at my ball next week," said De Vaux.

"I shall be very happy, indeed; it is rather a long way to Delmaine Court from where I am; but I can easily put up at the village for the night."

"My house is quite full, otherwise I should have offered you a room; but you will be very comfortable at the 'Stag's Head.'"

"I have not a doubt of it. I suppose if I appear by ten o'clock I shall be in time?"

"Well, you must not be any later," said De Vaux; and so the conversation dropped.

During the rest of the evening the doctor frequently took an opportunity of watching

Mr. De Vaux pretty closely, regarding him with the air of a man who had made an important discovery, and wished to assure himself that he was not mistaken. He took care not to let the object of his scrutiny observe what he was about; but once their eyes met by accident, and De Vaux instantly looked the other way.

When the doctor reached his home, late that night, he found a letter on his table, upon opening which he manifested the greatest interest in its contents. It was, indeed, of a very startling nature, as will shortly be developed in the course of our tale. This much may be premised, that it indisputably solved the question whether Milroy and De Vaux were one and the same person.

CHAPTER IX.

Extraordinary preparations were made by Mr. De Vaux for the brilliant ball, to which every one of the least consequence in the county had been invited. Workmen had been busy for nearly a month erecting a grand temporary ball-room, of large dimensions, on the lawn immediately adjoining the dining-room windows. The latter being very lofty, and extending down to the floor, were turned into doorways, through which an entrance was effected into the ball-room. All the decorations of the dancing saloon were on the most magnificent scale, the ceiling being formed of wavy festoons of light blue and pink silk, while the walls were hung with yellow silk. Round the

sides of the ball-room numerous niches had been left, in which were alternately placed the finest marble statues from the picture-gallery, and exquisite pyramids of flowering exotics. The back of each niche consisted of a large mirror, so that there appeared endless vistas of beautiful flowers, statues, and massive candelabra throwing a flood of mellow light over the brilliant scene. As in the case of the St. Petersburgh ball, nothing was seen of the orchestra, and the strains of music seemed to be wafted from a large flowery screen, formed of wreaths and garlands of every variety of colour.

Nothing could surpass the taste with which all the work was executed, and the different avenues which led to the house were throughout hung with innumerable coloured lamps, shedding a radiance as bright as day.

Mr. De Vaux received his guests in the dining-room, which had been decorated in a style harmonizing with the dancing saloon.

Of course, to the great majority of them he was personally unknown, but all were alike charmed by the polished grace of his manner, and the winning smile he bestowed upon each. A long array of titled guests had responded to his invitation, because with a great many of them he was acquainted through former meetings in London society. One of the wealthiest commoners in England—young, handsome, and unmarried—was far too important a personage to be in any way slighted on such an occasion as this.

Punctually at ten o'clock Dr. Farebrother arrived, just as the earliest guests were beginning to be set down. Among the legion of liveried attendants who thronged the entrance hall it was difficult to discover who was the regular hall porter; but the doctor singled out a fat, solemn-looking, and portly individual, whom he drew aside for a moment.

"My name is Dr. Farebrother," he said,

at the same putting a sovereign in the willing hand held out to receive it, "and I expect that some one may wish to see me in the course of the evening upon very important business. Will you take care that he is not sent away?"

"That I will, sir," said the man, with alacrity; "but let me see—where can I put him? Every room in the house is choked full. Stop; there is a small one away in the corner of the wing that will do."

"Be sure that some one tells me when he arrives, but to make certain I shall come to you about twelve o'clock, for that is the time he will most likely be here. I told him to inquire for me at the side entrance, because he is in morning dress, and there will be such a crowd and confusion in the principal hall," said the doctor.

"All right, sir; I will see to it," replied the servant, thinking to himself that it was rather a singular hour and place for a medical

gentleman to see his patients, although the sovereign was quite a sufficient explanation, in his eyes.

Mr. De Vaux received the doctor with the utmost cordiality, but there was a singular mixture of sternness and melancholy interest with which the latter regarded his host, who apparently stood upon the very pinnacle of worldly splendour. There he was, the centre figure of a glittering and courtly throng, literally the "observed of all observers,"—the cynosure of every eye. Dressed in simple evening costume, with no other ornament than a flower of lily of the valley in his buttonhole, and a slender gold chain crossing his unembroidered black waistcoat, Aubrey De Vaux looked, every inch, a perfect gentleman. His studied simplicity of appearance extended to his face, because, while almost every man in the room wore moustache or beard, Aubrey had neither. He wore none of the dazzling diamond, emerald, or ruby

studs, massive watch-guards, or elaborately ornamented and flowered shirt fronts affected by the butterflies of fashion, but amid the emblazoned crowd there assembled, any one would at once have singled out that pale face, lit up by those wonderfully lustrous eyes, as a man of commanding position. He had indeed seemingly reached his meridian of intoxicating and dizzy eminence, but that grave-looking gentleman, with whom he had just shaken hands, had a small packet and a little slip of paper in his pocket, with a few lines of faded handwriting upon it, which could tell another tale.

Amongst the first arrivals was Mr. De Burgh, who happened to be on a visit in the neighbourhood, and between whom and Aubrey the greeting was very cordial.

"You will find your old friend, Miss von Borgern, at the end of the room, De Burgh, as beautiful and entertaining as ever," said Aubrey, with a smile.

"Thank you—I shall soon find her out."

As De Burgh was crossing the room in search of Ida, he felt himself tapped on the shoulder, and, looking round, saw that it was Doctor Farebrother. His face flushed with surprise at this unexpected meeting, but he grasped the doctor's hand very warmly.

"Who would have thought to have seen you in this house, Doctor Farebrother? Of course you must know everything now, because he would never have asked you if you could tell of his doings as Edward Milroy."

"I cannot agree with you there," said the doctor, with a peculiar smile, "that might be the very reason why he does ask me. Reflect for a moment and you will see my drift."

"True; you are right," replied the other.

"Come with me for a moment into the ice-room," said the doctor, putting his arm through that of De Burgh; "I

have something very important to tell you."

They withdrew into one corner of the refreshment room, and the doctor spoke to De Burgh for some minutes in a low, earnest tone of voice. It was easy to observe, by the latter's expression of countenance, that something of extraordinary interest was being communicated to him. As, however, they could not remain long unnoticed talking together so earnestly, they presently returned to the ball-room, the doctor whispering as they separated—

"You see it is of immense importance that you should be able to identify him."

"Of course, of course; I understand," was the hurried reply.

"Ah! Miss von Borgern, I have found you at last," said De Burgh, as he shook hands with Ida. "I did not think when we parted on the banks of the Neva that we should meet again so soon."

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. De Burgh.

I thought you would be in this neighbourhood in the course of the summer."

"Yes, some great friends of mine live not very far from here, and I came with them to-night. How beautifully the room is decorated; certainly De Vaux has wonderful taste in these matters. I declare this is almost equal to his St. Petersburgh ball."

Ida did not say anything to this allusion to that well-remembered scene, for the subject was one of most mournful interest to her. Mr. De Burgh observed that his remark was not responded to, and with quick tact saw that he had made a mistake.

"There is no place like England after all," he continued; "I have made a vow to give over my wanderings and become a club man, until some brighter opening dawns upon me. How say you, Miss von Borgern, whom I will empanel as my jury and judge rolled into one, club or no club?"

"Most decidedly no club," said Ida,

smiling; "prisoner at the bar, have you any answer to give why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"My lord, I have none," answered De Burgh, very demurely.

"Then the sentence of the court is, that you be confined to quiet lodgings within the precincts of St. James's for the space of twelve calendar months, placed upon a diet of cold mutton and toast-and-water, be deprived of your cigar-case and subscription ticket to Mudie's, and furnished instead with copies of all the standard law-books published during the present century, and a sewing-machine," said Ida, gaily.

By one who knew her well, it would have been noticed that Ida's merry badinage was forced, and her laughter hollow. In truth, it was entirely foreign to her nature to give way to mere ebullitions of pleasantry of this sort, but she felt that she must assume the mask of gaiety. Mr. De Burgh, too, was unquestionably nervous and ill at ease, which

would account for the levity of remarks made with the sole motive of keeping up appearances.

As twelve o'clock approached, even the calm and reserved Doctor Farebrother seemed to grow anxious and uneasy. He looked at his watch every now and then, and did not join in the dancing at all, but hung about the entrances to the saloon. When the hour arrived, he passed out of the dining-room, and looked for the hall-porter to whom he had first spoken.

"The gentleman you expected has come, sir," said the man, as the doctor approached him.

"Then will you show me to the room where he is?" was the reply.

"Certainly, sir; come this way."

The servant now led the doctor along several long and brilliantly lighted passages, meeting, as they went, various attendants bustling about, while the whole mansion resounded with the sounds of revelling so

cheerful in a country house. At length they came to a more obscure corridor, in a portion of the building that was very rarely used, and, opening a small door at the end of the passage, the doctor found himself in a rather dimly lighted room. A gentleman closely muffled in an overcoat, and with a dark neckerchief on which completely concealed his features, stood opposite the fireplace. The greeting between the two was hurried, but friendly, and they spoke together for some time in subdued tones, apparently fearful lest they might be overheard by any stray passer-by.

"It will certainly be a most painful scene," said the stranger, after a while, "and I shall be truly glad when it is over. I suppose you don't expect that any violence will require to be used."

"Violence?—pooh! nonsense! I am never mistaken in these peculiar cases, and I can already see that he quails beneath my eye, although he must indeed be a man of

most extraordinary nerve to go through what he has done. How admirably, too, has he sustained both characters—what astonishing self-possession it required to keep them up!"

"What a sad case it is, too—a man of such noble talents, such ancient and honourable descent, and gifted with his marvellously winning manners and fine qualities of mind," said the stranger, musingly.

"Still, justice must be done, and these magnificent estates rescued——"

"Hush! do you hear any one approaching?" said the stranger in an anxious voice, as he bent forward to listen.

"I daresay it is only some servant hurrying along; every soul in the house is far too busy with the revelry of the night to pay any attention to this remote corner," answered the doctor.

"I suppose, if it is to be done now, the sooner everything is over the better. How long do you expect to be?"

"Well, I can hardly say; it depends upon how he is engaged at the moment. At any rate, I shall lock the door and take the key, in case any one should wish to come in here. I know very well that the hall porter will never trouble his head about you again; besides, I told him that you would leave by the same private entrance you came in at."

"Very good; then I shall wait patiently, and when I hear the key put into the lock, this will be the signal that you are there."

"Yes, you can depend upon me," said the doctor, as he left the room and closed the door softly, locking it after him.

Cool and resolute as the doctor was, he had now an extraordinarily delicate and indeed dangerous duty to perform, which might well tax even his skill and unflinching determination. He might easily be excused if his lip quivered slightly, and a little nervous twitching of the fingers was

apparent. When he re-entered the ball-room, he saw that Mr. De Vaux was dancing in a quadrille set in front of the raised dais, where the long array of stately and titled dowagers present were seated. His partner was one of the loveliest girls the doctor had ever seen, even in this land of lovely women. She was a blonde, with a complexion of dazzling brilliancy, and her face was lit up by blue eyes, whose witching expression no painter could convey to his canvas. Mr. De Vaux himself regarded her with undisguised admiration, and seemed to be talking with unwonted animation to the beautiful siren. It seemed an absolute impossibility to disturb the master spirit of this splendid scene by any ill-timed summons to a private conference, but the urgency of the contingency was so stern and imperative that, at whatever risk, it must be done.

When the dance was over, Mr. De Vaux, after leading his partner once or twice up

and down the room, conducted her to her chaperone, Lady Mount Vernon, and then approached the entrance to the ball-room. He was about to enter the dining-room, as if with the intention of giving some orders, when suddenly he stopped, and, turning round, took a survey of the ball-room. The doctor could never hope for a better chance than this, and he at once availed himself of it.

"Mr. De Vaux," he said, very quietly, "as you are disengaged for the moment, could I have a word with you in private?"

De Vaux turned round in an instant at this singular request, and his face visibly blanched as he heard that well-known voice. He retained his coolness, however, and replied courteously—

"Certainly, Doctor Farebrother; but you must be aware that I cannot remain long away from my guests."

"I shall not detain you above a few minutes," said the doctor, as they passed

through the dining-room. So quietly was it done, that no one even observed that Mr. De Vaux had left the dancing saloon. He led the doctor along a passage into his own private study, and, the moment they both were in the room, De Vaux locked the door.

"You will excuse my taking this precaution, doctor," said Aubrey, in his most studiously urbane tones, as he withdrew the key from the lock; "but really every room in the house is invaded by the servants to-night, and we should not be left undisturbed for a minute." In the natural excitement of the moment, the doctor did not notice that in reality they were completely shut off from the hall by two heavy swing doors, covered with green baize, one at each end of the passage which led to the study. Both doors being open, De Vaux had closed them as they passed through, by merely touching a spring, unobserved by the doctor. This, as will be seen in the sequel, had an

important effect upon what followed. There was an oil lamp standing upon the study table, which cast a tolerably clear light throughout the room, and De Vaux took a chair by the side of his writing desk, motioning the doctor to a seat near the door.

"Now, doctor, I am at your service for five minutes, but not a second more," said De Vaux, smiling, "because the Duchess of Beauclerc will by that time be ready to go to supper."

The doctor's suspicions were a good deal disarmed by this apparent utter unconsciousness of his real motive for withdrawing De Vaux from the ball-room, and he hesitated a little how to open the terrible announcement which he had to make. In fact, he hoped that De Vaux's conscience would do its inevitable work and the necessity for a most painful scene be thus obviated. He still eyed his host very keenly, however; but if the latter had, at

first, showed any signs of tremulousness when the doctor's ominous request fell upon his ear, every trace of it was now gone.

"I am really sorry to have to choose such an unseasonable moment, Mr. De Vaux, for what it is my sad and solemn duty to tell you, but——"

"Stop, stop, my dear sir,—pardon my rudeness in thus interrupting you, but under the circumstances, you will excuse it, I am sure. I know what it is that you are going to say, and here is my answer; you could not have chosen a better moment, because I feel in a most liberal humour."

De Vaux said this in his gayest manner, at the same time taking a small bunch of keys from his waistcoat-pocket, and selecting one, proceeded to open a despatch-box which stood upon the table. The doctor did not interrupt him, because he wished to see what this evident misapprehension of his opening expressions would lead to, but

he still regarded De Vaux with the greatest watchfulness.

"Stupid! this key will not answer," continued De Vaux, with elaborate coolness; "but, let me see, surely I have another cheque-book in this drawer," he said, stooping slightly down, "and by-the-way, we need not now box ourselves up like condemned criminals,—perhaps, as you are nearest it, you might kindly unlock the door, while I write out a cheque."

All this was spoken in the calmest and most thoroughly unsuspicious tones, yet still the doctor did not relax his vigilant scrutiny of De Vaux's countenance. However, he could not refuse such a simple request, and accordingly, he reached forward to take the key which was offered to him. De Vaux was still stooping over one of the drawers in the writing-table, and did not look up as he held out the key, but just as it passed into the doctor's hand, Aubrey that instant turned and literally threw himself

upon the former with tremendous force. So sudden was the onslaught, and so completely had even the lynx-eyed medical man been deceived by Aubrey's consummate acting, that he lay upon the floor, helpless as a child, under the grasp of steel which encircled his throat. Aubrey had fallen upon the doctor, but the terrible gripe which he brought to bear, gave him complete mastery over his prostrate antagonist. Indeed, the doctor had been slightly stunned by the force of his fall, and lay at full length with his eyes closed, while not a sound was heard except a faint gurgling in his throat.

De Vaux's motions were now as quick as lightning. He knelt upon the doctor's chest, who seemed still unconscious, and relinquishing the frightful pressure upon the throat, proceeded to tie Farebrother's hands tightly together with his pocket-handkerchief. This he did in a minute or two, and examined the knots carefully, to see that they should not slip. Next he unlocked a

drawer, and took from it a loaded revolver, which he closely inspected and then placed at full cock, laying it afterwards on the table. He then raised the doctor's head until it rested upon a low, easy-chair, and arranged a cushion at his back, so that his position might be as comfortable as possible. The former now gave symptoms of reviving as Aubrey loosened his neck-tie, and also threw a little water over his face.

A remarkable change had taken place in Aubrey's whole expression and appearance, since the first moment that he closed upon his antagonist. There was an air of triumphant pride in his flashing eyes, and a most sinister smile upon his lips, as he surveyed the man, under whose glance, but a few minutes before, he had visibly quailed. His eyes seemed to glisten with irrepressible exultation at the complete success of his marvellously acted stratagem.

Doctor Farebrother now opened his eyes and encountered the gaze of Aubrey De

Vaux, who had resumed his seat and was leaning back in his chair as calmly and unconcernedly as when they first entered the room. One hand just toyed with the revolver which lay upon the table, and in the other was Aubrey's delicately scented sprig of lily of the valley, which had fallen from his coat during the struggle.

"Why, doctor, I am afraid the fall has hurt you a little, you look rather pale," he said, with a mocking air of sympathy.

"Aubrey De Vaux, you have conquered me this time; I own it and acknowledge that I am completely in your power," replied the doctor, with forced composure, for he saw his tied hands and felt the thorough helplessness of his position.

"This is really most considerate of you, my dear Doctor Farebrother, although perhaps a little unnecessary. Any doubts which you may entertain upon the subject, however, I shall be most happy to remove," returned De Vaux, with terrible irony, as he

took up his revolver and just allowed its ice cold muzzle to rest against the doctor's clammy brow. The latter shuddered all over when he felt the pressure of the iron, and breathed a hurried prayer, for he actually believed that, next moment, he would be a dead man. He was resolute and fearless, and had stood face to face with death ere now, but knowing as he did, the secret and mystery of Aubrey De Vaux's whole life, what chances of mercy or forbearance could he hope for now?

And yet, strange to say, the deadly weapon was withdrawn and laid upon the table as before, while six round, red rings were seen stamped upon Doctor Farebrother's brow, on the spot where the revolver had rested. Not a sound was now heard, save the monotonous ticking of a French clock which stood upon the mantel-piece. Aubrey glanced at this, and at the same time, drew his watch from his pocket.

"Come, doctor," he said, "we must make

haste, for I cannot keep the Duchess waiting, and we have already been ten minutes in this room. However, my business will soon be finished now."

Life is very dear to all of us, in spite of the gratuitous boastings of mock heroic philosophers, whose cheeks blanch as they hear the doctor's carriage wheels at their door, and Farebrother involuntarily glanced round, in dim hopes of discovering any loop-hole of escape from his relentless, implacable, yet cruelly courteous foe. The latter saw that despairing glance, and his fingers at once closed upon the revolver again.

"It is not the slightest use, doctor," he coolly said, "there are three shut doors between us and the hall, through which not a soul dare venture without my orders. There is only one window in this room, you will observe, and the servants have long ago bolted it and closed the shutters for the night. Perhaps you would like to be satisfied on this point," he continued, in a mock-

ing tone, at the same time reaching across one hand and slightly drawing the window curtains to display the oak shutters beyond.

The doctor saw clearly that his sole chance of safety lay in humouring De Vaux, because any ill-advised attempt to alarm the servants would infallibly infuriate him, and Farebrother's fate must then be sealed.

"Mr. De Vaux," he simply said, "I am in your power; what do you mean to do with me?"

"Doctor Farebrother," returned Aubrey, with bitter irony, "listen to me for a few minutes, and then you shall know. In the first place, let me ask *you* what right and title you had to come to my house under the assumed cloak of friendship, *but with my death warrant in your pocket*," he continued, with strong emphasis upon the last clause.

The doctor made no reply, for what indeed could he say?

"You may well be silent," resumed Aubrey, "but I shall interpret your motives. With a smile upon your lips, and soft words of courtesy in your mouth, you came here this night to drag me to a miserable death, delayed it might be for a while by the law's *merciful* consideration, but with nothing beyond save a sure and an awful death. You would first have consigned me to a living tomb, and then forsooth! have held out to me the consolation of a speedy and unerring doom! Now, who gave you power to be my executioner, as completely as though you held the hangman's halter in your hands? Did I ever injure a hair of your head, or lift up so much as my finger against any one who may be dear to you? What a poor, petty triumph after all would you have had, and what wonder if the agonies of remorse for what you had done should eventually reach even your relentless heart! But you have been foiled in the moment of your anticipated success, and, as

you will see, the very instrument which was to bring about so terrible a catastrophe, wrested from your grasp. Fool that you are! do you think that, after having baffled the gloomy shadow which has so long tracked my path, I would suffer myself to be ensnared by your wretched myrmidons of the law? But time passes away—this scene must be finished. Give me that paper and the will."

De Vaux spoke in tones which, though wonderfully calm, were yet sternly decided, but the doctor still hesitated to reply.

"Give me those papers," said the former, with a shade more warmth in his voice; "you know the alternative if you refuse," continued De Vaux, pointing ominously to the revolver. "Remember, too, doctor, if I blow your brains out it will be no murder!"

With these words he gave a wild and bitter laugh.

"You shall be obeyed," said the other,

sullenly, for he knew that refusal would not be of the slightest use, because, even if De Vaux did not put his worst threats into execution, he could effectually prevent the doctor from giving any alarm, and, after possessing himself of the precious documents, take such measures as to preclude all chance of discovery. Doctor Farebrother accordingly took out his pocket-book, and, opening it, produced a small packet tied with silk, and a slip of paper upon which some faded handwriting could be traced. De Vaux received the papers without a word, and, holding them towards the light, examined them very minutely.

"Yes, they are the same," he said, after a pause; "I am much obliged to you, Doctor Farebrother, for taking such care of them. I assure you they will now be perfectly safe in *my* keeping," continued De Vaux. Unlocking his despatch-box and taking out a small leather pocket-book, he folded and placed in it the papers which contained those few

words of such inestimable import. "Now, doctor, I shall only detain you a few minutes more."

As he said this, Aubrey drew his chair close to the writing table, and selecting a pen proceeded to write upon a sheet of letter paper. He was careful to pick out one which was perfectly plain, without crest or motto of any sort upon it, and had written two lines when he suddenly stopped.

"I must be very cautious in what I do, doctor, with such clever men as you to deal with," he remarked, holding the sheet up to the lamp; "exactly what I thought, the water-mark is 1864; this will scarcely suit my purpose. Let me see; here are some more sheets, but I am afraid they are all the same date—no, here is one of 1860 which will do."

Aubrey now struck a light and applied it to the paper on which he had first commenced to write, watching it until the sheet was totally consumed. He then proceeded

to inscribe the same words on a second one, dating it 20th June, 1860.

"Now, doctor, you will be good enough to copy exactly what I have put down, and sign your name at the end," said Aubrey, placing a fresh sheet with the same water-mark before Farebrother, whom he assisted to a chair, at the same time untying the knots which bound his wrists together; "but first I should like you to read it over, in order that you may see clearly what you are about."

The doctor glanced over the paper, and, when he finished it, threw down the pen exclaiming—

"I cannot sign this."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear you say so, because it places me under the disagreeable necessity of settling the matter rather abruptly," answered De Vaux, coolly, as he once more took up the revolver. Farebrother saw that he was in earnest, and that no alternative remained for him but to

comply; consequently he slowly copied what De Vaux had written, and signed his name as required. When he had finished, the former carefully read the writing over, and folding up the paper, placed it in his pocket-book beside the first small packet which he had received from the doctor.

"You need be under no apprehension for the safety of these documents," observed De Vaux; "those which you brought so obligingly along with you this evening I shall take especial care of. Now, all that remains to be arranged must be done by you; I have had sufficient trouble for one evening. Of course you did not come here to-night unprepared, and it will be necessary for you to inform those with whom you are acting, that their services will not be required. You see how considerate I am," said De Vaux, with cutting irony.

"I shall do this," answered the doctor.

"Then I think I may now return to the ball-room, and, as you have been rendered

perfectly innocuous, to use your own medical phrase," said De Vaux, significantly touching the little book, which he returned to his pocket, "I shall be happy to see you again among the dancers."

"No, sir; you can hardly expect me to appear as your guest after what has passed between us."

"As you please, doctor. I know exactly all that you have done, and what will probably be your future course of action. In a week from this date you shall hear from me again, and possibly I may require you to call here then."

The doctor bowed, and made no reply.

"Your necktie is a little disordered," said De Vaux, with his former tone of calm politeness, "and you had better come with me to one of the dressing-rooms, to avoid attracting the servants' notice."

With these words Aubrey rose, and after carefully locking all the drawers which he had opened, and placing the revolver in one

of them, he led the doctor along the passage through which they came to the study, and took him to a small dressing-room on the ground floor. He exercised the precaution of locking the study door after them, in case any traces of the extraordinary scene which had occurred there might be observed. Not another word passed between him and the doctor, who after a few minutes proceeded to the chamber in the wing, before mentioned, where the stranger awaited his return with anxious expectation. In half an hour afterwards they both descended to the passage which led to the side entrance of the mansion-house, and took their departure.

Aubrey De Vaux once more returned to the ball-room, where his absence had scarcely been noticed in the bustle and excitement of the gay scene, and not a feature of his countenance betrayed any trace of the singular incident which had occurred during the interval; but he, and he alone of

all that joyous crowd, knew of the remarkable results which must inevitably follow ere a few days were past, and well might his pale cheek be faintly flushed by the reflex of the irrepressible elation which he felt. Yet this had been brought about simply by the transference to his pocket of that packet tied with silk, and the small slip of paper with those few lines of faded handwriting traced upon it. In his eye, however, there shone a proud consciousness of triumph, as he moved from group to group of fashionable revellers, bestowing words of polished courtesy to all whom he addressed. He had no time to speak to Ida during the evening, and she, too, was quickly engaged for every dance; but once their eyes met, and it seemed to her that his glance was full of tenderness.

Mr. De Burgh was restless and uneasy all the time that Aubrey was absent from the ball-room. When he returned, the former looked keenly at him, and was cer-

tainly surprised to observe the air of proud confidence with which he moved about. Somewhat later, as De Burgh stood near the door, a servant slipped a note into his hand, on which was hurriedly scrawled in pencil these words—

"Nothing can be done at present; he knows everything. Call on me if you can to-morrow."

The morning was far advanced before the last of the guests had driven away from Delmaine Court, and the bright, early sunbeams gave a sickly hue to the coloured lamps and decorations of the avenues. When De Vaux retired to his room, he drew aside the window-curtains so as to admit the broad light of day, and the warm rays of the sun almost dazzled his eyes. It was an exquisite summer morning; already the songsters of the woods were merrily trilling their lays, and all nature seemed bursting into joyous life; but as De Vaux watched the rising sun leaving his

eastern skies, a leaden feeling of depression overcame him, when he reflected upon what might happen ere that sun should this evening sink beneath the horizon.

CHAPTER X.

It was considerably past mid-day when Mr. De Vaux left his bedroom, after some hours of feverish and uneasy slumber. The intensely exciting scene, which had occurred between him and Dr. Farebrother on the previous evening, naturally had its effect in increasing the constitutional restlessness under which he laboured. From all his guests he had received the warmest congratulations on the marked success of his magnificent entertainment; but he was too much accustomed to adulation of this sort, to feel more than a passing sensation of satisfaction that his efforts had been appreciated.

After a slight breakfast, at which meal

he was almost the only person present out of the large circle staying in the house, De Vaux entered his study. The room had not been disturbed since he locked the door on the previous night, and, owing to the shutters being closed, was in almost total darkness. When he admitted the daylight, all the marks of the struggle which had occurred there could be distinctly traced. In a few minutes, however, De Vaux restored the room to its usual aspect, and presently he sat down at the writing-table. Selecting a large sheet of paper, he arranged pen and ink upon the desk before him, with the evident intention of writing a long letter. Before he commenced, he leant back in his chair, as if musing upon what he was about to write, before actually committing his thoughts to paper. For nearly half an hour he thus meditated; but when he did begin, it was with the air of a man who had thoroughly made up his mind what to say. Occasionally he would pause

for a little, then presently resumed with greater diligence than before, and when his letter was finished he had covered four sheets of paper with close writing. After the letter was concluded, Aubrey slowly read it over, carefully considering, as he went along, the exact purport of what he had set down. Judging by the expression of his countenance, he seemed to experience a sensation of relief when he had sealed the envelope, and addressed the letter simply to "Miss Ida von Borgern." Placing it in a secret drawer, he rose up and left the study. Before quitting the writing-table, however, Aubrey wrote a few lines in German upon a small sheet of paper, which he enclosed in an envelope, and also directed to "Miss von Borgern," putting this second letter in his pocket.

As Aubrey was returning to his bedroom for something he had forgotten, he passed by the small morning room which was always specially appropriated for Ida's use.

It was her own private sitting-room, and was constantly occupied by her, especially when there was a large circle of visitors staying in the house. Scattered about the snug apartment were those customary little feminine knick-knacks and ornaments, denoting the refined tastes and pursuits which solaced Ida's leisure moments. Her drawing materials, music, prettily bound volumes of poetry, flowers, and innumerable other objects—all lay about in charming order and array, yet giving unmistakeable evidences of constant use. The door was slightly ajar as Aubrey passed, and he observed that Ida stood looking out of the window, gracefully and lightly dressed in her becoming morning costume. A thought struck him, and he knocked gently at the door.

"May I come in, Ida?" he said.

A flush of pleasure mantled over Ida's face as she heard the well known tones; and her reply, "Of course you may, Aubrey," showed the joy which she felt.

"Well, Ida, how do you feel after last night's revelry? A little tired, I presume."

"Not very, although I wonder at it, because I danced almost everything."

"I am glad you enjoyed yourself. Did you notice your St. Petersburgh friend, Mr. De Burgh?"

"Oh! yes—I danced with him. He tells me that he means to settle in England for some time, and give up travelling about. Why do you not follow his example, Aubrey,—surely you have had enough of a wandering life?"

"Ah! Ida, you never spoke a truer word than that!" exclaimed Aubrey, in a tone of such melancholy and deep feeling that Ida looked up wonderingly in his face.

"You seem to feel the force of what I say," she replied. "Why, then, must you hurry away to America, as you spoke of doing lately?"

"Ida, it will be the last time that I shall

ever leave my home, I promise you!" said De Vaux, with a peculiar solemnity of expression. "I am sick and weary of this life, and shall positively pine away for that repose which seems ever denied to me."

"Are you quite well, Aubrey?" said Ida, whose feelings of tenderness and love for him had now returned with greater force than ever.

"I am as well as I shall ever be," answered De Vaux, with a bitter smile.

"What a pity it is that you seem always unable to shake off those gloomy feelings which appear to weigh down your spirits. Occupation and business are what you stand in need of; and I am sure that actual, hard, official work would do much to cure this despondency."

"Yes, Ida; but fancy the trouble it would cost me to learn this work—and you know how I hate any irksome details."

"But this is the very feeling against which you have to contend; and, after all,

what a little, petty annoyance is trouble. Such trifles as not being able to find a pin, or a piece of thread, when one is in a hurry, no doubt actually cost us, at the time, a good deal of trouble; but are we not ashamed of allowing such insignificant absurdities to irritate us?"

"Indeed all this is only too true, Ida; and if I could have been reclaimed, you alone are the person who would do it. But it is now too late—too late!"

Again a chill ran through Ida's frame as she heard those desponding words, and marked the dejected aspect his countenance wore. She wondered what was the reason of this reaction of feeling, because last night there was an unwonted amount of buoyant hopefulness in Aubrey's looks, as she occasionally got a glimpse of him in the intervals of the dances. What could that secret be, of such vague and mysterious import, to which he had, more than once, alluded? Would the time never come when he should

prove his confidence in her devotion and love, by seeking her sympathy and advice?

"Now, we need not dwell further upon this subject, Aubrey, because, however seriously we talk it over, it always leads to nothing. As long as you persist in rejecting the sympathy of those who wish you well, it is idle to appeal to any higher standard of moral doctrine by which your motives could be fathomed."

"Oh! Ida," exclaimed Aubrey, passionately, "bad as the wayward inconsistency of my conduct may have appeared, you wrong me if you believe that I am utterly selfish, callous, and incapable of being softened by the love which others may bear me. God knows that my heart is bursting with tenderest feelings, but a terrible necessity forces me to curb and restrain them. You saw me last night, Ida; did I not seem radiant with happiness, and do I not know well that I was an object of envious admiration to almost every one of

my guests? What a splendid and happy lot must be mine, no doubt they thought—but oh! what a hollow and deceitful mockery of happiness was the reality, if they only knew it! Bear with me yet a little while, Ida—dearest Ida!—and ere long you shall know all!"

There was a vehement earnestness in Aubrey's words which vividly impressed itself upon Ida, and she was convinced that this was no hypocritical semblance of sorrow, fostered by the promptings of a mere morbid affectation and egotism. That remarkable wildness of expression in his eyes was again singularly visible, and she felt an ominous foreboding of coming evil. Aubrey stood beside her, and, in his emotion, had taken her hand in his own, while the nervous grasp with which he held it, bore silent testimony to the truth of what he uttered. This was no empty parade of mere mawkish sentimentality, as might have been the case upon former occasions

when he toyed with the feelings of that loving and, with all her faults, true-hearted woman. She knew not what to say, but was strongly conscious that every word he spoke told its tale of deep-rooted suffering and pain, whose intensity it needed all woman's gentlest and sweetest influences to assuage.

"Dearest Aubrey!" she said, soothingly, "I feel sure that you are not well—you seem excited, and look as if you wanted rest and repose. Will you not lie down on the sofa here for a little—no one ever comes into this room, and I can watch over you, so that you shall not be disturbed? Do this to please me—to please Ida, whom you have known since she was a child."

There was a simplicity of natural affection in Ida's tones and gestures, as she said this, which deeply affected Aubrey. It was not spoken with the warmth of a passionate lover, but rather with the eager and fond entreaty of a sister. His eyes filled with

tears, which he made no effort to restrain; it was the first burst of genuine emotion that he had felt for years.

"Ida, Ida, I do not deserve this kindness," he murmured; "indeed, I do not. Let me go; I am not worthy of you."

"No, Aubrey, you shall not go now. What a debt of gratitude do I not owe you? Have you not for years given my father and myself all the comfort and splendour of the most luxurious home, and can I ever recal one bitter word or unkind action on your part? Not one; and now, when I see you suffering, and in pain, shall I not try to relieve that sorrow, even although I am forbidden to share it?"

Ida looked truly beautiful as she uttered this. There was no meretricious display of feigned grief in her earnest, eloquent looks of love, for whatever worldly dross had formerly sullied her fine and womanly character was long ago melted away, and the virgin purity of her heart shone forth with all its

bright, golden lustre. Disappointed hopes, and warmest affections wasted upon an unreal, though brilliant phantom which always eluded her grasp, instead of souring her disposition and envenoming her feelings, seemed but to bring forth the meek and feminine beauty which lay dormant beneath that apparently proud and imperious exterior. Aubrey De Vaux had tampered with her finest and most cherished sensibilities, when he was in the full flush of his dazzling prosperity, and saw all the world at his feet; yet now, when he declared with a solemnity which was unequivocal and unfeigned, that some dreadful misfortune impended over his head, the woman with whose love he had paltered, and whose devotion he despised, hung over him like a guardian angel!

"Leave me, Ida," he said, in a voice broken by emotion; "leave me, dearest, to my own punishment and torments. I have no right to distress you by a weak display of grief and remorse. Oh! if I had but

listened more to your sweet counsel, I might now have been spared all this bitter and unavailing agony of mind. And yet they wrong me who would say that I am utterly heartless and indifferent to others' woe. I have attempted to play a desperate game, and so far I have won triumphantly, but oh! Ida, the stake has been my own soul! For the last time the die has been cast, and again has fortune favoured me, but mark the result. I have gambled away my eternal happiness in exchange for a few short years of earthly pomp and splendour. I can truly exclaim in the language of Holy writ, although from my lips this may be profanity, that I have gained the whole world, but lost my own soul. Henceforward my lot must be that of Cain's—a vagabond and a wanderer upon the face of the earth!"

Ida was at first frightened by the wildness of Aubrey's aspect, and the fierceness of his passionate emotion; but as he pro-

ceeded she grew calmer, seeing that some deep seated and hidden cause for so much display of mental anguish must unquestionably exist. Still, however, she knew full well the inconstancy and waywardness of his character, and was at a loss what to suggest to still these ravings, as it seemed, of a diseased brain.

"Aubrey," she said, calmly, "you know well that I have no motive but your own good in what I advise. I have noticed lately that your eyes have worn a feverish look, and that there is an unnatural and hectic flush upon your cheek. Women are much closer observers in these matters than your sex, and I am sure that you are ill. Let me at once send Martin for the doctor, and I shall tell papa to explain to the visitors that you are fatigued after last night's exertions, and intend to keep your own room for a day or two."

At these words De Vaux smiled sadly, and shook his head with a gesture which

seemed to say there was no hope for him. They had one good effect, however, for there was a quiet melody in Ida's sweet voice which appeared to lull his restless spirit, and it was clear that the violence of his emotion was past.

"Ah! my sweet Ida, doctors can do me no good now. It is too trite to quote Macbeth, but you know what I would say. Your gentle voice and kindly manner, indeed, fall like dew upon my spirit. Forget what you have heard, and pardon me for thus giving way before you, my more than sister."

"I see, Aubrey, that you are better now, but let me implore you to consider well what I have said. It is quite evident to me that something is preying upon your mind, and undermining your bodily health; now, promise me that you will consult some one," said Ida, in a tenderly appealing tone.

"I swear to you that I will, Ida, and that very soon."

"It may seem unbecoming in one so little qualified as I am to speak on the subject," said Ida, modestly, "but I cannot help thinking that you might derive great consolation by admitting some clergyman into your confidence, and seek the peaceful remedy of religion, if you are in doubt or mental disquietude.

"Alas! Ida, only a week or two ago I made a solemn vow that I would look for comfort to the only real source from whence it comes, but my old weakness and irresolution made me forget my promises and good intentions."

"Still, it is never too late, and they say no one is without hope, even at the very last moment. As for me, I have no right to utter a word upon this sacred subject, because my whole life has been one of cold irreligion and worldly mindedness. But some day I hope I may change," exclaimed Ida, earnestly.

"Ida, Ida, you are much too severe upon

your very venial faults. I only know that you have ever been my best and truest friend. I shall leave you now, for I have several things to attend to, but we must talk these matters over again."

"You may feel certain that I shall be only too happy, Aubrey; but you must promise me that you will not over exert yourself to entertain all these people. I shall be so glad when they are gone."

"Rely upon it, Ida, that I shall take the greatest care of myself. How thankful I ought to be that I have you near me, to keep such an affectionate watch over my welfare. Good-bye for the present, my sweet Mentor!"

As Aubrey spoke these words he pressed Ida's hand very kindly, and looked into her face with the old loving expression, which she knew so well. He lingered by her side, as though unwilling to leave, and it seemed as if there was still something on his mind which he hesitated to make known. Now

that his brow had recovered its usual serenity, and his eyes no longer flashed with that terrible wildness which had frightened Ida, she once more returned his looks with the old glances of affection. As he slowly moved out of the room her eyes followed him, as if she felt deeply the void which his absence created, though it might be but for a few hours. He too, as he closed the door, watched Ida very wistfully, and appeared loth to leave her presence. However, the door was shut and he was gone, and a singularly vague feeling of uneasiness made Ida heave a long sigh as she heard his retreating footsteps faintly sounding in the corridor.

CHAPTER XI.

Scarcely a fleecy cloud flecked the face of the bright blue sky, not a breath of wind dimpled the surface of the ornamental waters scattered about the park, and a thin, hot haze hung lightly over the distant horizon. It was a lovely English summer day, and all nature basked in the glowing rays of the sun. Hardly any of the guests had yet come out of doors, and the gardens and pleasure grounds were completely deserted. Aubrey stepped out of the entrance door on to the mossy lawn, and paused for a little to survey the beautiful scene which lay stretched out before him. A smiling expanse of pleasant meadow and park lands, dotted with clumps of trees in full foliage,

and sinuous, glistening sheets of water, formed the foreground; while beyond this, a richly wooded and highly cultivated country stretched away in gently undulating varieties of hill and dale, till the landscape imperceptibly blended with the shimmering, distant haze.

Aubrey De Vaux stood there gazing over all this proud domain, which, after all, was but a small portion of his vast estates. He was in the full flush of youth, the petted idol of society, the man whom the world said could not have a care. In a little while he slowly sauntered across the lawn, and, turning down one of the side walks, entered the flower garden. It was rather a favourite lounge of his, because there were pleasant, soft turf walks along which he could stroll, and an exquisite array of variegated flower-beds were spread out in gorgeous profusion. Working at one of the parterres near the walk on which Aubrey was proceeding, was his old Scotch gardener.

As Aubrey marked his shrewd, honest countenance, a thought struck him and he called to the man—

"Good morning, gardener; this is fine weather for your flowers."

"'Deed it is, sir; though I wadna' mind a wee drap rain."

"Ah! you sons of the soil are always finding fault with the weather," said Aubrey, smiling; "why, man, what better could you wish?"

"Nae doot, sir, we are na' muckle better than our neebours in this respect," observed the North countryman, resolved not to commit himself. The man was a bit of a character, but had the reputation of being one of the most respectable, thoroughly conscientious, and honest servants upon the whole estate.

"By-the-bye, gardener, I want you to do something for me. Here is a letter," said Aubrey, taking the one in German, addressed to Ida, out of his pocket,—"rather

an important one, which I wish delivered to Miss von Borgern on a particular day, if I should happen not to be back by that time. I am going away upon particular business, for a day or two; and in case I am not here, you understand, I wish the letter to be delivered to the lady."

"I see, sir—I see," replied the man, with all the respectful gravity in the world; "only tell me the day, and the young leddy will get the letter sure enough."

"Well, this is Wednesday; now, if I don't return on Saturday, you are to deliver the letter that day."

"I'll do that, sir, trust me for it," observed the gardener, carefully depositing the letter in his coat pocket, "and I'll just tak' it down to my house 'e noo, for fear it should get filed."

"Perhaps that is as well. Good morning." With these words Aubrey passed on, and in a few minutes had reached the other extremity of the flower garden. He had

debated within himself how to arrange about that letter, and at first intended to post it in time to be delivered on Saturday, but upon second thoughts abandoned that idea. This gardener had been for more than forty years in the family, and his character was justly very high for trustworthiness and integrity; therefore Aubrey felt that, with such a man, the letter was perfectly safe. It was simply a few lines in German, by way of precaution, telling Ida where she would find the key of the secret drawer, in which was deposited the other long letter, containing, as will be seen, some extraordinary revelations.

He now sought a pathway which led from the gardens, and presently found himself under the green cool shade of one of the plantations. It was delightful to wander at listless ease under the over-arching boughs, which warded off the ardent rays of the sun from those who walked beneath; and a soothing, delicious humming sound,

from the countless insects glancing all around, pervaded the still, fragrant air. A feeling of languid repose now began to settle upon Aubrey's senses, as the pathway led him through still more beautiful woodland scenery. The trees by degrees, as he receded further from the pleasure grounds round the mansion-house, were seen to be of larger and more luxuriant growth, until he passed several noble specimens of venerable forest monarchs, hoar with age, and spreading their giant boughs in fantastic masses around. In this direction the woods extended for some miles, but at one part they were intersected by the parish road which passed through this portion of the estate. A massive stone wall bounded the wood on one side of the road, stretching all round the extensive range of park. On the other side there was only an ordinary fence, and a small wooden gate gave entrance to the woods which lay beyond. Through this gate Aubrey passed, and pursued a narrow

pathway which led into the recesses of the chase. After a time the track became less and less distinct, until it was entirely lost amid the profusion of tangled underwood and feathery ferns which abounded. Still it was a delightful sylvan retreat, and the masses of mantling verdure formed a grateful, cool shade, while the lulling notes of the wood pigeons furnished appropriate music for so sequestered a spot.

Aubrey wandered listlessly on and on, without heeding how the hours slipped away, for his mind was completely engrossed in thought. A weary, weary feeling of heart-sick depression weighed heavily upon him. He knew that, ere few days were past, some definite course of action must be adopted by him, involving one of two inevitable results. Either he must abandon the magnificent position which he held in the eyes of the world, and with it the excitement which gave a stimulus to his existence, without which life would lose all

its charms, or prepare for a death-struggle with fate, in which, though at first the odds might be in his favour, yet, having once entered the lists, the final catastrophe, unless by an absolute miracle, must be one of unutterable horror. Last night had witnessed a signal triumph, on Aubrey's part, over the man who held almost the issue of his life or death in his hands; but, with that triumph, he knew full well that the scabbard was thrown away when he unsheathed the sword. He had indeed secured his escape, provided he chose to avail himself of it at once, but to his haughty spirit death was far preferable to retreat. But now the precious moments of action were fast fleeting away, and his weak irresolution would most certainly precipitate his impending fate.

Still Aubrey sauntered on through the quiet greenwood, and heeded not that already the sun was verging towards his setting. He occasionally rested against some gnarled trunk of a tree, or upon a

mossy bank strewn with wild flowers. His thoughts extended over all his past life, its wasted energies and neglected opportunities, and finally centred upon the loving woman, whose affectionate vigilance had this morning been so signally manifested. Upon reviewing the whole of his conduct towards her, he could come to no other conclusion than that he had deeply wronged Ida. In wanton playfulness he had won her heart, and then tossed the precious gift away like a broken bauble. This pearl of inestimable value he had trampled under foot, yet he was met with no outburst of vindictive fury or bitter reproaches, but was offered the tender sympathy of a noble-hearted woman. The thought was maddening, and Aubrey dared not trust himself to dwell too long over the past.

By degrees he passed through the entire length of the woods, and found himself upon the verge of some unfrequented common land which terminated this portion of his

property. At the other extremity of this common the line of railroad ran which led to the metropolis. Aubrey had never been at this part of the estate before, and as the ground sloped rapidly down at the other side of the railway, he thought he should like to see what was the aspect of the country at this point. Accordingly he crossed the common at a rather rapid pace, because he was now aware, by the sun having actually dipped below the horizon, that it was high time to retrace his steps. At this juncture he was met by one of his own tenants, who happened to be returning from market by a short cut. The man respectfully touched his hat as they passed one another—a salutation which was punctiliously returned by Mr. De Vaux, although he was, being such a stranger to Delmaine Court, perfectly ignorant of the honest farmer's name. Suddenly he recollected that this man might be able to show him a shorter way of getting back

to the house, so he resolved to ask him.

"Good evening," he said, turning round; "you know the country better than I do; perhaps you will kindly tell me if I can get back to Delmaine Court by a shorter road than through the woods."

"Yes, sir, you can," replied the man; "if you cross the railway down there, at the next field you will come to a road which will save you a good mile and a half."

"Thank you, my friend. I know your face, but you must excuse me if I confess that I am ignorant of your name."

"John Crossley, sir, at your service. We all hope to see more of you now that you have come to live among us, Mr. De Vaux."

"I thank you for your good wishes, and shall always do my best to promote the interests of my tenantry. But my time presses just now; good evening," said

Aubrey, courteously, as he passed on in the direction indicated by Farmer Crossley.

Presently he arrived at the wooden fence which skirted the railway, and clambering over it, stood upon the turf beyond, from whence he commanded an extensive view. The railroad ran along the side of a long valley, through which a small river meandered, watering the rich pasture lands on either side. Beyond the meadows, up the undulating slopes of the valley, stretched the arable land, covered with teeming crops, and here and there patches of wood gave beauty and variety to the fertile landscape. In the extreme distance the white houses of a small village were visible amidst a surrounding belt of wood, and one or two gentlemen's residences were picturesquely placed in the valley side. A white smoky mist already had commenced to exhale from the river's bed, and hung heavily over the surface of the water.

Aubrey leant against the railway fence,

admiring the quiet beauty and peaceful repose of the scene. In a little while he heard in the distance the dull, faint sound of an approaching train. He was in that frame of mind when any trivial incident attracts attention, and he watched the far-off tail of white steam of the coming train as it appeared at intervals among the trees. Although a railway train is one of the commonest objects in life, still most men like to look at it, as the ponderous carriages rush tumultuously past, but for what reason they might be puzzled to explain. Yielding to this feeling, Aubrey resolved to see it pass, and then at once to proceed home as rapidly as possible. The waving trail of steam showed the railroad's course, although the actual line itself was not visible, and the long, rumbling roll of the train sounded nearer and nearer. Presently it deepened into a dull, hollow, and sonorous roar, as the heavy mass rolled over a long viaduct which spanned some marshy ground, and

then seemed suddenly to die away. Aubrey glanced at his watch and saw that he must certainly be very late if he delayed longer, and fancying that the train had stopped at some station, he left the high bank on which he stood and descended on to the line itself, with the intention of crossing. Just as he placed his foot upon the permanent-way, which at this point extended in a perfectly straight line for more than a mile, he observed the train coming along the rails at full speed. He did not step backwards, as most men would have done, nor did he cross to the opposite bank, but stood perfectly still, watching the rapidly advancing train. It was the evening express to London, and the engine was at its utmost pressure of steam, so that the speed at which it travelled was tremendous. Aubrey calmly watched the swiftly rushing train which was bearing forward with irresistible momentum to the spot where he stood. Not a breath of wind stirred the still, heavy atmosphere, and the

billowy masses of white, cloudy steam, as they poured forth from the black funnel, seemed to swell upwards in form like an enormous fan. So straight was the line, that as the train swept forward with avalanche force, no part of it was visible to the eye of one standing on the rails, except the great black front of the engine.

An extraordinary feeling of fascination seemed to rivet Aubrey's gaze upon the train, which now was close upon him. The engine appeared to swell mysteriously in bulk, as it came on, for no actual motion could be seen. This singular optical illusion is well known, and constitutes a great source of danger to the unwary. The engine-driver now saw that a man was right in the path of his train, and instantly sounded the shrill danger-whistle three times to warn him of his imminent peril. Aubrey stood there, immovable as a rock, seemingly completely spell-bound. His eyes alone rolled wildly about, and the marble pallor of his

face was almost as ghastly as that of a corpse. Feeling and volition had suddenly become utterly dead within him, and he stood motionless, with all the calmness of a martyr waiting for death. The most subtle pen would fail to describe the mysterious train of ideas which rushed through his mind. It was no paralyzing shock of terror that prevented Aubrey De Vaux from standing aside from the path of certain death. No, it was rather a sublime indifference to life: for, henceforward, what would life be to him?

Once more did the shrill shriek of the railway-whistle re-echo through the balmy evening air, but Aubrey De Vaux never moved. The train was within twenty yards of the spot on which he stood, but, even now, one slight spring to the side would save him. It might not be: his hour had come at last. He closed his eyes, and bent his head slightly back, and for a second his lips moved. Was it a prayer which he thus breathed,

while standing on the threshold of eternity? Let us hope that he did, for the next moment all was over, and the dead body of Aubrey De Vaux was dashed upon the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

That evening the whole of the guests at Delmaine Court assembled, as usual, in the drawing-room, but neither the baron nor Ida had yet appeared. The latter did not intend to come down to dinner, but had already partaken of a slight repast in her own sitting-room. She felt in low spirits and fatigued, partly from the effects of the previous night's gaiety and partly from a vague feeling of uneasiness regarding Aubrey De Vaux.

It was already past the hour at which dinner was usually served, and the guests were beginning to comment upon the unpunctuality of their host, who had not yet appeared. In a few minutes the baron was

observed to enter the room, and at once proceeded to the principal lady present, to whom he whispered something. The start of horror which she gave showed that it was an announcement of a startling nature, and the baron's face was deathly pale. They agreed not to communicate the terrible news to the guests that night, but that the intelligence should be told in the morning, when all might then make arrangements for their departure. Accordingly, it was spread about the drawing-room that Mr. De Vaux was indisposed, and the baron gave his arm to the lady before mentioned, which was the signal for all the others to follow. In a little while the hum of voices, and the subdued laughter from the lips of beautiful women, as they delicately sipped their champagne, told that the pleasures of the evening had commenced.

The news had been conveyed to the baron with that marvellous promptitude which such horrors always ensure. A

labouring man, who knew Aubrey by sight, had witnessed his death, but was so far off as to be powerless to render any assistance. By this man the baron was apprised of what had occurred, and a chosen party of the gardener's assistants were sent to bring the body to the mansion-house. The baron gave the strictest orders that not a syllable should be breathed to Ida about the awful event, for he feared that the very worst consequences might ensue if the intelligence were not most delicately broken to her.

That night, about ten o'clock, a group of men, bearing some heavy object covered with a large black cloth, might have been seen slowly moving up the avenue. They brought their burden by a side walk to the private entrance into the house, and carried it up to Aubrey's bed-room. It was gently laid upon the bed, and the curtains were closely drawn round about it. The baron had met the mournful procession at some distance from the house, and saw that due

reverence and respect was paid to the remains of his friend. Well might such of the guests as were near him remark that he, who was usually so full of ready, genial conversation, sat that evening looking pale, abstracted, and silent. However, the sprightly jest and the merry laugh went round, and the happy circle of guests in due course dispersed for the night, with the full expectation of pursuing the same pleasant routine on the morrow.

But next morning the awful news spread rapidly throughout the household, and by ten o'clock the only person who knew not what had happened was Ida herself. It was a most painful duty which the baron had to perform; but every hour only increased the difficulty of breaking it to her. Last night he had been informed by the old gardener about the letter which Aubrey had commissioned him to deliver, and that mysterious missive was now locked up in the baron's writing-case. He thought of

taking it with him when he went to tell his daughter, but altered his mind, and resolved for the present to leave it unopened. With a heavy heart, and fearing deeply that the worst result might ensue from the terrible shock which Ida must necessarily suffer, he entered the morning-room in which she sat. Scarcely had he bid her good morning, before she noticed the serious expression of his face, and the agitation which he could not repress. He began by alluding to the recent return of Mr. De Vaux, and remarked that from the first he thought him an altered man. From this he went on to say that Aubrey's health was in reality greatly undermined by the unnatural course of life which he pursued, and especially that, for the last few days, he had really been seriously unwell, although he refused to own it.

Ida listened to her father with breathless interest, and her heart beat violently as he proceeded. With all a woman's quick apprehension, she saw that something was

wrong, and the baron had great difficulty in parrying the searching questions which she put. By little and little he had to own that Aubrey was in reality dangerously ill; but, to his surprise, Ida appeared almost to have anticipated this, and did not manifest so much emotion as he expected. Knowing that the news could not possibly be kept from her, when every one in the house was already familiar with all the ghastly details, the baron at last told her the very worst. She received the intimation in stony silence, without any shriek of horror or tumultuous outburst of passionate grief. Her face in an instant blanched as white as a sheet of paper, and her limbs seemed to grow perfectly rigid. The power of speech seemed to be taken suddenly away from her, and the light of reason to have deserted her eye. The baron was frightened by this awful calmness, and took his daughter's hand in his own, but felt it perfectly cold and clammy. Presently he heard some

faint sounds coming from her lips, and distinguished the words, "Dead! dead! dead!"

"Ida, my child! come to your room and lie down. You look very ill," said her father, anxiously.

"Yes, father, I am very ill," she replied, in tones of agony which pierced his heart.

He gently raised her from the chair on which she sat, and supported her out of the room. She leant upon him mechanically, and seemed almost to have lost the power of her limbs. However, they reached her bedroom, and she lay down upon the sofa without uttering another word. The Baron kissed her affectionately, saying he should order her not to be disturbed at present, and that when he had arranged various matters of urgent importance, he would again return to see how she was. Ida, who was still apparently in a sort of trance, assented without a murmur, and her father in a few minutes had left the room. When he was

gone, she lay on the sofa perfectly still, with her eyes steadily fixed upon the window, although the expression in them was one of listless vacuity. As yet she found no relief in tears, the whole thing had been so sudden, so appalling, and so utterly bewildering, that the fountain of her physical sensibilities was completely frozen.

All over the house were now heard the notes of preparation by the visitors for immediate departure. A profound sensation of regret was felt by all at the terrible death of one so gifted and so young. The event was rendered still more shocking by the fact of its coming so soon after his auspicious introduction to the society of the county, and when every one had been so highly impressed with the graceful appearance he had made. Matters were in this condition when the Baron came downstairs from his daughter's room, and he retired to Aubrey's private study to be out of the way of interruption. While he was occupied in writing

several letters, a servant knocked at the door and informed him that Doctor Farebrother wished to see him immediately upon important business. The Baron replied that, although he was particularly engaged, still he would see the doctor, and the latter was accordingly ushered into the room. It is unnecessary, in this place, to recount what passed between them, but they remained for more than an hour in earnest conversation.

"Then you will both be here this evening," said the Baron, as he rose to open the door to let the doctor out.

"Yes, certainly, by ten o'clock at the latest. I should very much like to be satisfied if those papers are all safe; perhaps you would not mind going upstairs to see."

"By all means I shall; just wait a few minutes and I will make sure," said the Baron, closing the door after him.

He went up stairs, and entered the darkened bedroom where Aubrey De Vaux

lay stretched out upon the bed. Gently drawing aside the curtains, he raised the black pall which covered the body, and felt for the dead man's pocket-book. He found it at once, and reverently replaced the shroud, closing the curtains as before, when he withdrew from the room. Presently he rejoined the doctor, and, opening the pocket-book, took from it a packet containing some folded papers. One of them displayed the few lines which Doctor Farebrother, at Aubrey's dictation, had written on the previous evening in that very room, and the others were those which he had been forced to deliver up, as he lay prostrate at the mercy of his triumphant antagonist. What a mighty change had a few hours wrought in the fortunes of those two men!

"I suppose I had better retain these," said the doctor; "but just as you please."

"Well, under the circumstances I think you are the proper person to have them, but we can arrange everything to-night. Two

rooms shall be ready for you, and the most perfect privacy insured."

"I leave the matter in your hands, my dear sir," said the doctor, and in a few minutes more he drove rapidly away from the house.

That night, at about ten o'clock, a carriage drove up to the door, out of which the doctor, accompanied by a gentleman whose face was completely concealed by a slouched hat, and large muffler round his neck, descended. The Baron met them at once, and the three proceeded to the small study before-mentioned, where refreshments were already laid out. Here they remained in anxious conversation until long past midnight, when they at length sought their different apartments.

CHAPTER XIII.

There is always an impressive solemnity which seems to pervade a house when one of its rooms is tenanted by the dead. Each window-blind is drawn down, and the darkened light befits the gloomy feelings of those who mourn the loss of the departed one. All voices are hushed into a whisper; the footsteps of those who move about the house are measured and noiseless; a feeling of respect for the memory of him, whose cold ashes have not yet found their last resting-place, imposes a curb upon the most thoughtless tongue. Although his servants saw but little of Aubrey De Vaux, still they knew how good and indulgent a master he was, and whenever he had occasion to speak to

any of them, his language and manner were alike courteous. Death coming upon such an one—striking him down without an instant's warning in the joyous springtide of his manhood—was an awful lesson to the thoughtless tribe of butterflies who had thronged his rooms the night before. In his case, too, it seemed doubly melancholy that the last sad offices of the death-chamber must be performed by mere hireling mourners. No beloved mother or fond sister was there to kiss the marble forehead, or strew flowers over the silent dust, and it was a terrible mockery to think that the man, who was courted and petted by the proudest and noblest in the land while he lived, had not a relative or friend to follow him to the grave!

Yes, there was one man who cherished deep feelings of gratitude and affection for Aubrey, and that was the Baron. He knew that he had lost a friend who was to him as a brother—whose delicate and generous

bounty had enabled him to live in a position of affluence for years past. All that now remained for him was to see that Aubrey's remains were carried with due honour and reverence to the grave, and then he must seek another home for his child.

Ever since the fatal announcement was made known to Ida, she had remained in a state of stupor and bewilderment. It seemed impossible to realize the terrible fact that she would never more hear the accents of that well-known voice, or receive the kindling glance of those dark eyes. Doctor Farebrother had, by the Baron's request, seen her, and prescribed perfect repose until the force of the shock to her nervous system should gradually abate. Consequently she did not quit her room, but lay all day upon the sofa, in a listless, dozing state, perfectly unable to take the slightest nourishment. Often and often she fancied that she heard Aubrey's voice in the corridor outside her

door, and would start up for an instant, listening intently. But the bitter truth always returned with double force, and she would sink back exhausted, only to give way to long fits of silent weeping. Then she read and re-read any letters of his which she chanced to have preserved, handling them with the gentlest and most reverential touch. Any little scrap of his handwriting, even the direction of an envelope, was now treasured up by her, and the different photographs of him were marked with the tears which could not be repressed. Every petulant expression, or flippant word which he had ever uttered were now forgotten, and she dwelt over all the delicate attentions, all the disinterested kindness which she had received from him who lay below in that darkened room. The different presents he had given her were now precious relics in her eyes, and a small lock of his hair which she possessed, was henceforward invested with priceless value.

Doctor Farebrother told the Baron that Ida must be, as much as possible, diverted from the memory of De Vaux, and that immediate change of scene ought to be secured for her. Accordingly it was arranged that as soon as the funeral was over, and the necessary legal formalities concluded, they should both leave Delmaine Court. It was now the fourth day after Aubrey's death, and his body rested in a richly decorated coffin, heavy with silver mountings, which was laid out in the library. A large pall of black Genoa velvet, edged with silver lace, covered the bier, on which the coffin lay, and fell in folds down to the floor. Six candles in massive silver candelabra stood beside the body, and were always kept burning. All the arrangements were carried out with that splendour which befitted the vast possessions of Aubrey De Vaux.

Ida had several times expressed a wish to her father that she should be allowed to have one last look at the coffin which con-

tained the remains of one who was so dear to her. This request, by Doctor Farebrother's advice, was not granted, because the latter feared for the consequences which might ensue, in Ida's weak and excited condition, should her wish be gratified. She was therefore affectionately told by her father that it was considered better not to shock her feelings by a sight of the sombre mortuary decorations. This announcement she received in silence, and the Baron concluded that she thought no more upon the subject.

The day had been one of continued rain, accompanied by violent gusts of wind, which scattered the leaves from the boughs, bending the great trunks until they seemed ready to be torn up by the roots. The groaning of the mighty branches was heard even amid the roar of the tempest, and several monarchs of the forest, uprooted and stretched upon the ground, bore vivid testimony to the irresistible fury of the wind.

The lashing showers of rain drifted against the windows, increasing the melancholy and gloom which pervaded the mansion. Towards the evening the violence of the storm greatly abated, and a hollow moaning from the trees fell faintly on the ear, until by degrees this died away into a profound calm. Ida listened to the wailing of the storm while it was at its height, and it seemed to harmonize with her desolate feelings. As the gusts of wind diminished in force, she lay down upon her sofa, and, taking up a book, sought to beguile the time by reading. But she listlessly turned over page after page, without in the least taking in the sense of what she read, for her thoughts wandered back to the memory of him who had gone for ever. It was impossible to realize the sickening truth that he was dead, and she fancied she saw him before her, as he appeared in the ball-room the night before his death, full of health, spirits, and in the pride of manly strength. Why should she

be denied the mournful consolation of imprinting one last kiss upon his cold brow, she who had loved him with all the depth and tenderness of an impetuous and passionate nature?

The Baron generally came into Ida's room between eight and nine o'clock, and remained until it was time for her to seek some repose. This evening, as usual, he sat in her room till ten o'clock struck, exerting himself to cheer the dull gloom which weighed so heavily upon his daughter. He talked hopefully of their future plans, and how they should visit his native country, where she was comparatively a stranger. Owing to Aubrey's delicate liberality, he was possessed of quite sufficient means to ensure them a comfortable subsistence, and he had little doubt that in time, Ida would make a good marriage. She listened in silence to her father's kindly endeavours to divert the melancholy current of her thoughts, although she appreciated the

affectionate motives by which he was prompted. Presently he kissed his daughter, and bade her good night, and Ida was again left alone with her thoughts. Shortly afterwards her maid came into the room to see whether she required anything more, and when the girl had retired, she knew that no one else would disturb her that night. From this servant Ida had learned full particulars of what funeral arrangements had been completed, and that the body was laid out in state in the library. She resolved that, be the consequences what they might, she should have one farewell look at the dead body of him whom, in life, she had loved so well.

Eleven o'clock had struck some time ago, when Ida very cautiously opened her room door, and peered anxiously out into the dark corridor. Not a sound was heard throughout the house, and the solemn, profound stillness seemed to chill her spirits. She feared lest her father should be moving

about, and hearing the noise of footsteps, discover his daughter thus disobeying his express injunctions. However, everything was perfectly still, and she ventured out into the passage, drawing her room door close to, without actually shutting it. She was completely enveloped in her dressing-gown, and the wavy masses of hair fell down over her shoulders. In her hand she carried a small wax taper which burned with a clear, steady flame, lighting up her pale face, and bringing into strong relief her finely chiselled features, calm as those of a vestal priestess.

As Ida noiselessly threaded her way through the long silent corridors, she was vividly reminded of another occasion on which, much at the same hour, she had gone down to the library, and the remarkable incident which had happened in that haunted room. When she thought of him who now lay there in cold state, she could not repress a shudder, and none but a woman of her undaunted resolution would

have cared to enter alone that chamber of death. Her mind was made up, however, and nothing would cause her to swerve from carrying out the object she had in view. She had now arrived at the top of the principal staircase which led down to the grand hall, and paused here to listen whether any one was stirring throughout the house. All was still—a deathlike calm hung over each murky passage; and a faint, a very faint earthy odour seemed to indicate that he, who had been struck down by the unerring archer, lay below, awaiting to be carried to his last home. In a few seconds more she had descended the staircase and gained the library door, pausing for a moment before she entered.

Ida felt her heart beat faster as she stood beside the door which alone separated her from the solemn presence of the dead. We all know the mysterious feeling of dread with which we approach the clay-cold remains of those whom in life we have hung

over with fond affection. The features which, when lighted up with the genial glow of health, we gaze on so joyously, inspire us with awe when they are marbled over with the pale hue of the grave. There is something unutterably chilling, too, in the aspect of the sombre trappings of the dead, for no upholsterer's frippery can conceal the ghastly details from observation. Well, therefore, might Ida pause ere she entered that gloomy chamber; but her mind was made up, and the next moment she opened the door.

In the centre of the library the bier was placed, bearing the coffin, upon which a subdued light was thrown from the wax candles by its side. The lid was closed down, and a large silver plate bore a simple inscription upon it, stating Aubrey's age and the date of his death. Ida advanced close to the coffin and gazed upon it with throbbing heart, recalling to mind the last time that she had seen him, only a few days

before. The melancholy look with which he seemed to regard her often haunted her memory, but now those eyes were closed for ever in that solemn sleep which knows no waking.

Again another scene flashed across her mind; the apparition which she saw in that room, almost at this very hour! Involuntarily she lifted her eyes towards the panel on the wall out of which the mysterious figure had seemed to emerge. Was it possible that it moved? Did her eyes again deceive her with some horrible mockery? Her brain reeled, and a sickening feeling of unutterable terror shook her limbs. It was no illusion, and yet what was the awful sight she now beheld? The wall had opened and the grave had given up its dead! For there, confronting her, stood Aubrey De Vaux, in perfect health! Yes; the man whose dead body lay stretched out in the coffin at her feet, had shaken off the ghastly panoply of the grave, and appeared

in his own palpable form and substance—a living soul!

It was too much for Ida's weakened frame, and gave the last shock to that reason which the fearful event of the last few days had already almost unhinged. Giving a wild shriek of frenzied laughter, she fell heavily forward on her forehead; and that scream of agony pierced through the mansion-house, summoning all who heard it to the chamber where the dead man lay.

CHAPTER XIV.

The funeral pageant was over, and all that was mortal of Aubrey De Vaux had been, with due reverence, committed to the grave. A great concourse of the leading gentlemen in the county assembled to pay the last mark of respect to the man who, but a week before, had welcomed them to his house on a scale of such princely splendour. The mourning coaches had departed, and the long train of equipages defiled through the avenue gates, and there now remained only four gentlemen, who were assembled in the library. One of them was the chief mourner, and every person had been startled, in a marked manner, at the extraordinary resemblance which he bore to Aubrey De Vaux.

Every feature corresponded, the voices were exactly similar, and all declared that such a marvellous likeness had never been beheld. This was he whom we have hitherto known as Edward Milroy—the other three were the Baron, Doctor Farebrother, and the family lawyer. Various papers and deeds lay scattered over the library table, and the man of law read extracts from them, at intervals, in the dry, formal tone peculiar to such occasions.

"There is one paper which I am anxious to read, Mr. De Vaux," said the Baron, addressing Milroy, whom we shall henceforth call by his proper name; "it is the letter your cousin wrote to my poor daughter a few days before his death."

"By all means let us hear it," said the gentleman thus named; "it will probably throw some light upon the state of his mind at that time."

"That, I think, is very probable," said

the Doctor; "and it may prove other matters of great consequence."

"We shall soon see," observed the Baron; "here is the letter." With these words he produced the sealed packet which Aubrey had addressed to Ida, and which it was judged better not to deliver to her. The contents of the letter were as follows:—

"My dearest Ida,

"I now sit down to pen the last words which, in all human probability, I shall ever address to you, and to fulfil the promise I made that you should one day hear the whole story of my wasted life. You will, I trust, pass lightly over my faults; and when you learn my hapless tale, it may furnish an excuse for any unfeeling caprices of conduct which, I fear, have caused you many a bitter pang.

"My father died when I was only a few years old, leaving a will containing some remarkable provisions. He had noticed in

me, from the days of my early infancy, a strong taint of the insanity which is hereditary in our family; and, as I grew up, these symptoms must have become still more marked. In his own case he displayed a great amount of gloomy misanthropy, and he seemed to dread lest in me should be developed madness in its worst form. Accordingly, he resolved that I should be placed under charge of some one of approved fidelity, who was never to inform me of my real position in life. An ample sum of money was vested in trustees for my maintenance, and, in event of my perfect restoration to health, I was then to receive the sum of one hundred thousand pounds. My father next looked about among his relatives for an heir to his enormous wealth. He had no brothers or sisters, and only two or three distant cousins, so that whom to select was a matter of some difficulty. Only one of his cousins was married, and this gentleman had a son, who bore an extraordinary

resemblance to me, insomuch that, at one time, my father conceived the idea of passing this boy off as his own son. We were both then about seven years of age; and shortly after my father formed his plans, his cousin died, and his only child was about to be sent to school. Now you must pay particular attention to what follows, because it is the turning-point of this strange story.

"I had been little more than a fortnight under the charge of the medical man to whom my father had confided me, and who resided in the country not far from the birthplace of the intended heir to the De Vaux estates. In fact there were only a few fields between the two houses, which will explain the extraordinary circumstance I am about to narrate. One evening about dusk two gentlemen came to the house of the lady with whom my cousin lived, and said that, by Mr. De Vaux's orders, they were to take the boy away with them that night to Delmaine Court. As one of the gentlemen was

my father's lawyer, and had once or twice been to the house before, not the slightest demur was made, even although the lady in question happened to be spending the evening with a friend, and could not be first consulted. But when they came to look for the boy he was not to be found, having strayed away from the grounds about the house in which he usually played. Despatch being of the utmost consequence, as my father was dangerously ill and particularly wished to see the child, the two gentlemen and the servants set out to look for him at once. It was important that a particular train should be caught, otherwise they must necessarily have waited till next day.

"Now, singularly enough, it happened that, on that very evening I, too, had accidentally strayed from the house where I was, I may say, kept a prisoner. Although I was treated with the utmost kindness, still I was never allowed to walk beyond the garden and pleasure-grounds about the

house, and a very lofty fence was being erected to enclose these even more perfectly than before. I had only been there a week or two, and that day a new nurse had been got for me, in place of one who was leaving. These little details I mention, because without them, my story would seem utterly incomprehensible. I was allowed to play in the flower-garden when the evening was fine, and this night had gone out to the usual place. I was running about with childish glee, when I noticed, what I had never seen before, that a small door at the end of the garden was open. With child-like curiosity I wondered where the opening led to, and ran through it into the fields beyond. The unaccustomed feeling of being at large no doubt was delightful to me, and I ran on and on, until I began to feel tired. I must have got about a mile from the house, and, after passing the first field, found myself in a country road, with hedges on both sides, which led to the village a

little distance off. Just as I was beginning to wonder where I was, two gentlemen came hurriedly up to me, and one of them exclaimed, 'Ah! here he is; come along, my good little boy;' at the same time taking me by the hand. He spoke very pleasantly, and looked so kindly at me, that I took to him at once, and ran joyfully along by his side, until we came to a carriage standing opposite a house by the roadside. 'Jump in, my little man,' said the gentleman, helping me into the carriage, and we all three got in. Just as we were driving off, a servant came running up, and the gentleman called out, 'It is all right, we have got the little boy; I can't stop now, because I am afraid of losing the train. Mrs. Mainwaring will get a letter to-morrow explaining the circumstances, but you can tell her to-night what I mentioned, that Mr. De Vaux is seriously ill, and wished Edward taken to him at once. Send a portmanteau with his clothes to Delmaine Court by

the first train to-morrow morning.' With these words we drove off at a rapid pace, and I was so excited with the novelty of the whole proceeding that they could hardly keep me quiet on the seat. Although I was only seven years of age, these circumstances made a vivid impression upon me, and now, after the lapse of more than twenty years, they rise up before me as strongly as ever.

"Before I proceed further with my own story, I will merely mention what happened to that cousin whom I so unwittingly personated. He, too, had strayed beyond his usual bounds, and must have been met by the doctor who had charge of me, and who, directly the alarm was given that I was not in the garden, had sent out in all directions to search for me. As soon as the doctor found the child, who, from the astonishing resemblance between us, he naturally thought was the same who had just strayed away, he at once returned to his house. The strange nurse did not recognise

that this was not her own charge who came back tired and sleepy, and the alarm and excitement quickly subsided. Next day the child may probably have wondered where he was, and at the unaccustomed faces he saw around him, but he was too young to say anything that might have aroused suspicions as to his identity. Besides, I had been so short a time an inmate of the doctor's house, that any strange names my cousin may have prattled about would not cause inquiry to be made. And so the time passed away until the boy came to man's estate, when other events took place which shall be narrated hereafter.

"To return to my own story. When the carriage stopped, we then got into a railway train, and I fell fast asleep. It must have been very late that night when we arrived at Delmaine Court, and I was put to bed in the little room at the end of the left wing. Next morning, when the maid-servant awakened me, the sun was shining brightly

into the room, and I looked round with delight at the pleasant scene. I can remember that the girl who dressed me, and brought anything that I wanted, spoke in a sort of whisper, as if she feared to disturb some one in the next room. This I afterwards found out was because my father had died the night before, only about an hour before we arrived at the house. All the forenoon I was kept in the bedroom, and at last the servant took me for a walk about the grounds. However, I need not dwell further on these details, but go on to more exciting matters.

"The nurse who took charge of me while I was under my father's roof was the daughter of one of his gamekeepers, a young and handsome girl who had attracted his notice. When he sent me to the doctor's house to be out of the way, my father also considered it desirable, for the success of his plans, that my nurse should quit the country for ever, and as he had got her in his power, this

was effected without difficulty. Accordingly, some days before I was taken away, my nurse, of whom I was passionately fond, was married to one of the better class of servants on the estate, and she and her husband received a considerable sum of money from my father, on the understanding that they left this country and settled in Australia. They took their departure, but not before the woman had made herself acquainted with a secret which, as you will see, was of the deepest importance to those concerned.

"This girl had unusual facilities for observing my father's movements, and, knowing his strange character, was convinced that he was brooding over something which boded no good for me. She had noticed that he seemed to feel an unnatural aversion for his child, and this only prompted her to watch both of us closer than ever. Therefore, one evening when the family lawyer came to see my father, by special request,

she managed to conceal herself in the library in a dark recess, which was hidden from observation by a large oak book-case in front, and thus overheard what took place. She thus ascertained that it was intended to send me to the doctor for the purpose of being brought up under the strictest surveillance, and in total ignorance of my parentage and position, and that a large sum of money would be laid aside for my maintenance. Then the lawyer brought with him a formal will, which was executed by my father, depriving me of all title to the succession to the estates by reason of my strong symptoms of insanity, together with a certificate to this effect from my medical attendant; and my father made a concise narrative of all the circumstances which led him to form this determination upon a fly-leaf of the family Bible, signing the same with his own hand. These various papers, and the Bible referred to, he locked up for the night

in his own private drawer of the writing-table.

"Next evening the girl again concealed herself in the same spot, but the solicitor left the house that afternoon, so no further colloquy took place between him and my father. The latter, however, came into the room, and, after locking the library door, took out from the drawer the will, the Doctor's certificate, and the Bible. My nurse was able to watch what followed with perfect safety, and saw that he opened a door in the wall which she never knew of before, and pressed his hand upon a panel in the recess beyond, thus disclosing a small square receptacle, in which he deposited the precious documents. After closing everything, so that no trace remained of what he had done, my father left the library, and the girl emerged from her hiding-place. Thus we have seen that the whole proofs, requisite to disinherit and deprive me of the privileges of my birth, lay

concealed in the old panel in that secret recess.

"We have now arrived at the period of my father's death. No sooner did this event take place than the lawyers, of course, came to search for the will and other documents necessary to prove who was the rightful heir to such vast possessions. But no deeds could be found, for my father had not chosen to tell our lawyer where he had concealed them, nor was there the slightest evidence in his repositories to show where they had been placed. What was now to be done? They had certainly one powerful proof of what my father's intentions were, by the deed vesting the sum of one hundred thousand pounds in three trustees for the purposes before-mentioned.

"He had also executed another deed, by which, in event of his death before his son was twenty-one years of age, the three named gentlemen were to act as guardians to the boy, and administer the property for his behoof.

"By the former instrument, too, these trustees possessed other important powers; and the deed was very cautiously worded, although in some places it was rather ambiguous. An extraordinary idea now occurred to the lawyer, who, though a man of much talent, was completely wanting in principle; and after a time he gained his two coadjutors over to his plan. This was to make my cousin personate me, and of course assume my name, just as if he was the real son and heir, suppressing the document by which I was consigned to the Doctor's custody—although, in reality, practically, they acted upon it. Our extraordinary resemblance greatly facilitated matters, also the fact of my cousin having no relatives to know what had become of him; so that the lady, with whom he resided for a few weeks, was easily imposed upon by a fictitious tale accounting for his never returning to her. Then they imagined that they had several safeguards to protect them-

selves from serious consequences, should the scheme be in danger of being found out. In the first instance, there was the deed in existence actually authorizing them to dispose of the heir as a person insane, and this would be a terrible weapon to hold over the head of him whom they put in possession of these noble estates. Then they might, by instituting a minute search over the house, which, for reasons of their own, had not yet been made, discover the original will, and a plausible story might be invented for their delay in acting upon the first-mentioned instrument vesting the sum of money in trustees. Then there was the chapter of accidents involved in the marvellous resemblance between the two cousins. But whatever may have been hoped for, the result was that I was actually served heir to all my father's property; and that my cousin, who, as we have seen, they unwittingly substituted in my place, was taken away by the Doctor to a remote village in Germany, there

to be brought up in strict seclusion and restraint.

"Years passed away, and I was nurtured in the lap of luxury, all my whims and caprices studied and pandered to, and my two guardians always fawning upon me with their venal caresses. I grew up a spoilt, intolerant boy, the slave of every sudden passion, with no gentle and loving hand to control my stubborn spirit, or soften my wayward heart. Naturally my guardians were afraid of allowing me to be surrounded by high-minded and virtuous men and women, lest the sinister purposes which they had in view should be detected. No doubt they amassed riches at my expense, because the immense revenues of the properties passed through their hands, and they did not scruple to appropriate large sums, of course intending to make me approve of all their doings when the proper time came. But a mysterious Providence is always at hand to direct events as it thinks fit, and

overcomes the wiles of the spoiler apparently in the very flush of success. In this case Death was the irresistible opponent whom they could not evade. First the lawyer was carried off by a malignant fever, during which he was constantly visited by his co-trustee, who feared lest disclosures might be uttered in the patient's delirious ravings which might excite suspicion. The consequence was that the fever was communicated to this gentleman, almost, it would seem, as a retribution for the wicked course which both had pursued, and he too was carried off after a few weeks' illness. No one now remained except the Doctor, whose name, by-the-way, was Farebrother, he being a relative of another medical man, of whom more hereafter. Upon this man now devolved the heavy responsibility of determining what should be done in the singular circumstances in which he found himself placed. Consequently it was absolutely necessary that he should return to England;

and, for fear of what might happen should he bring his charge along with him, my cousin was left in that secluded German village, in the keeping of one of its inhabitants who was thought most suitable for the purpose. Again the mysterious hand of Providence was at work, for Doctor Farebrother had not been a week in England when, one day as he was out riding with that relative whom I mentioned before, his horse threw its rider and fractured his skull, so that he expired twelve hours afterwards. Strange retribution which so soon overtook those three unprincipled schemers!

"Before he died, Farebrother must evidently have dropped some mysterious expressions about the secret with which his bosom was burdened, although, at the time, they did not make the impression upon his relative which subsequent events so strangely developed. It is sufficient here to mention that he did say enough to germinate ideas which bore most important fruit

hereafter. Of course he had told nothing to the family, with whom my cousin was staying in Germany, about the circumstances of the boy, but had taken care to leave a supply of money in their hands, amply sufficient for some years to come, considering the quiet way in which he was to be brought up. I ought to state here that we were both about fifteen years of age when these events happened, and in consequence of Doctor Farebrother's death, new guardians were appointed by the law-courts to administer my affairs until I came of age. Although great irregularity was now discovered in the trust affairs and accounts, still none of the important documents executed by my father came to light, because not the slightest suspicion of their being in existence was ever entertained.

"Doubtless, all this time you will wonder how it was that I came to know such minute details of what happened when I was far too young to be aware of anything affecting my

dearest interests being carried out. It came about thus. Shortly after I came of age I received an ill-directed letter, with the Australian post-mark upon it, which at first, in my thoughtless carelessness, I was about to toss on one side, seeing that it was long, closely written, and evidently from some person in the humblest ranks of life. I did actually throw it into a drawer unread, but happening to look there a day or two afterwards, and seeing the letter, I determined to make myself aware of its contents. Imagine my surprise when I found it to be a document of inestimable importance to me, being a letter from my old nurse, setting forth the whole facts of what my father and my three guardians had done from first to last, as far as was known to the writer! She did not mention where the will was, being afraid lest the letter might fall into other hands than mine, and she was writing in my interest to warn me, as I was now of age, of what had been intended. My nurse

was firmly convinced that it was all a wicked conspiracy on the part of my father to deprive me of my just and lawful rights, because he had conceived some extraordinary aversion to me, and was encouraged in this view by the family lawyer, for his own sinister purposes. She further told me that it was intended to send me away to Doctor Farebrother's to be kept under restraint, and in ignorance of my real birth, and that my cousin was to be substituted as the heir. However, to her great joy, she said that one of the head servants, who had been some time in our family, wrote her a full account of how I had been declared by my guardians the proper heir of the property, and all the usual measures taken for educating me as my father's son and successor. This made her suppose, of course, that my father had changed his mind after all, and not shown such unnatural hatred of her darling boy as to disinherit and give him over to a miserable life. Still she wished me to know all

about these remarkable events, in case, at any future time I might be called upon to defend my title. In conclusion, she hoped that I would not forget my old nurse, but sometimes in my joy and prosperity remember the kind girl who had watched over me when I was a helpless child.

"This letter made a profound impression upon me, awakening, as it did, some vague and horrible ideas that now often begun to haunt me. Fitful and capricious as my temper and disposition were, it needed only these disquieting revelations to deepen the gloom which now too often hung over my spirits. Horrid suspicions tormented me that I was to be a victim to the terrible malady, which I knew full well had existed in our family for generations. I was inwardly conscious of the morbid feelings by which the gay hours of sprightly youth were so strangely clouded over, and you, who saw me in later years, labouring often under such terrible depression and despair, need

not be troubled now with details which your imagination and observation can readily realise. Consequently, I shall not dwell upon the succeeding years of my life, chequered as they were by alternating phases of recklessness, despondence, and despair. I tell you, Ida, that many, many times I would willingly have welcomed death as a relief from the agonies of mind which I endured, but the end for which I wearied was yet afar off. *I knew full well that the terrible day must sooner or later inevitably arrive when I should 'expire a driveller and a show,' a miserable, degraded, raving maniac!* Yet lacked I the moral courage to put a period to my wretched life, although such a thought often and often occurred to me, because I experienced a strange delight in showing how, apparently, I could baffle the demon who seemed always on the point of gaining possession of my soul. I loved to see the worldly minions of fashion, the fawning sycophants who hung upon my smile, cringing and

bending before me, and extolling my graceful qualities of mind, my princely hospitality, and my virtuous conduct. I resolved yet awhile to play a game with fate, and in my exultant and defiant recklessness, to try who should be the conqueror!

"My story will now soon be over; it is already much too long. I caused minute inquiry to be made, by one skilled in unravelling the most secret mysteries, about the medical man to whose care I was to have been consigned. I found out that there was some strange mystery attaching to the fate of my cousin. He had never been heard of since the time of my father's death, and I myself had almost a certain perception that in this boy I should find a rival and a foe. By degrees light broke in upon the seeming labyrinth in which I was involved, and I traced the Doctor's movements from place to place, finding out that the boy was hardly ever out of his sight. After the death of the former, my cousin resided for some years

with his German friends, and left them only when misfortunes overtook them, and their home was broken up. But, previously to this, my watchful emissary had been on his track and, even then, I was beginning to close in upon him. His footsteps were dogged on one or two occasions when I fancied that I should force matters to extremities, but then again my listless indolence would put off the evil day. I felt convinced that this man was the rightful owner and master of all my boundless wealth, and that some day the will proving this would be brought to light. My lawyers had always informed me that it was a remarkable fact that no actual will of my father's was ever found, and that the deed under which my three guardians had acted and sworn me as heir, was an informal and singular one, only as no opposition was offered to my succession, and no other relatives of my father could be heard of who knew about his habits or intentions, the law authorities confirmed

my guardian's title to administer during my minority. Read by the light of subsequent events, and taking into account their extraordinary anxiety to keep my cousin out of the way, coupled with the fact of a will in his favour having clearly been executed by my father, their course of conduct seemed very palpable to me. They knew that he was the rightful heir, but put me in his place, suppressing the will until it suited their purpose to produce it, meanwhile extorting what they chose from the estates, supposing that I would only be too glad to aid them when the proper time came.

"Of course I heard from the very first of my cousin's astonishing resemblance to me, and this only added to the imminence of the danger. Undecided and wavering as I always was, I did not know how to act, but at length resolved that I should meet my adversary face to face. I went to Germany with the express intention of finding out whether he had the least clue to his identity,

even although such a course I knew to be fraught with danger. The week before I arrived at the village where he resided, by a curious accident he had quitted his residence alone, and no one knew where he was to be found. At this juncture it was that I met your father, who, strange to say, had not long before passed an evening in company with my cousin, and gave me some important information regarding the latter's antecedents and character, which he had heard through some mutual friends. From that moment your father and I became fast friends, and I trust it will be found that I have never forgotten him, for I owe him a lasting debt of gratitude. Soon afterwards I again received news of my cousin, who had now assumed the name of Edward Milroy, and was traced to England. He could not elude my vigilant emissary, who haunted him like a familiar of the Inquisition, only that he never once allowed himself to be seen. I am now talking of what occurred

little more than a year ago, because Milroy, about that time, by a strange coincidence, came to a sequestered district, not above thirty miles from this, little knowing that he was so near his own birth-place, and the scene of events of such moment to us both. Matters were fast coming to a crisis, for, shortly after this, he met the girl Mary Forester, and the episode between these two and De Burgh, or Lawrence as he was then called, took place. I am now touching upon matters with which I know you are perfectly familiar, because subsequent events proved all this to me. Milroy could do nothing of which I had not immediate intelligence, provided it in any way bore upon my interests, and so skilfully did my agent manage things, that I actually became possessed of two important letters from Doctor Farebrother to my cousin, which he fancied were placed in undoubted security. Remember that for a long time past he knew that he was under some mysterious sur-

veillance, and in consequence, *his* life too was rendered miserable, although, of course, not to the same extent as mine. And here another of the actors in this exciting drama disappears from the stage, for about this time my admirably skilled emissary, who was devoted to my service by other ties than those of mere lucre, for I had saved his life while travelling abroad on one occasion, was taken away by death.

"Apparently the game was in my own hands, now, and I could, if I chose, crush my adversary, remaining all the while unseen, but I dare not bring myself to this, and resolved to let fate work out its own appointed course. But mark how unexpectedly the tables were turned. Most of the circumstances as they now occurred, are familiar to you as to me, but some very vital ones remain to be narrated. My old nurse had, singular to say, at such a critical moment returned to this country, though only to die. Edward Milroy encountered

her one day, and the extraordinary likeness between us deceived her into the belief that it was to me that she delivered a letter of inestimable importance, telling the precise spot where the will, by which I was stripped of all my wealth, and branded as insane from my very birth, was to be found. You know what followed. It was no apparition or phantom of the brain which you saw that night in the library. The man who stood there was Edward Milroy as he was called, but Edward De Vaux, master of Delmaine Court, as he actually is. Why need I dwell further upon what follows! but my mind is nearly disburthened of its secret. The will was found, together with every damning proof necessary to hurl me from my proud eminence in the eyes of the world. Doctor Farebrother was taken into confidence by Milroy, and the two conceived a scheme by which I was to be mercifully allowed to quit my native land for ever, and drag on a wretched existence in a foreign

country, fed by the bounty of the man who had stolen my birthright away and supplanted me in the affections of my father! Yes, in their mercy they agreed to dole out this surpassing boon to me, to the rightful heir of such princely possessions, the last inheritor of so noble a name. Ha! ha! How little did they know me, and how miserably weak were their calculations in dealing with a madman's cunning! They wrote me an anonymous letter ten days ago, in which they warned me that I had no right to a single acre of any of my father's estates, and to prove it, enclosed a copy of the one which my nurse had given to Milroy, telling all about the will and the circumstances relating to it. They suggested that after the ball, to which so many were invited, was over, I could quit the country, and from the resemblance between us, my cousin would at once step into my place, so that the world should never know the astounding transformation which had been brought about. Fools that

they were, as if I had not already adopted all my measures of action! I knew Farebrother was the master spirit of the two, and that, in his pride and self-conceit, he fancied that I would succumb at once. I threw myself in his way at Lord Mount Vernon's, on purpose to see what manner of man he was, and I marked his astonishment at the remarkable resemblance of features between Milroy and myself. Undoubtedly I found him to be a man of nerve and determination, but I felt irresistibly conscious that I should yet triumph, even although the odds seemed fearfully against me. Carefully I resolved upon the part I should play, and I succeeded completely in deceiving this astute and skilful man. We had a good deal of conversation together, and once or twice I let him observe that I seemed to cower and wince beneath his glance, as though I feared him. He fell completely into the trap, as you shall see from what follows.

"Both Farebrother and De Burgh were

specially invited by me to the ball, and, as you know, both came. But I could hardly have imagined that the former would choose such a scene to inform me that I must henceforth be an outcast and a wanderer, living upon the eleemosynary bounty of my cousin! Yet this man, whom I do not suppose to be more cruel-hearted than the majority of his fellows, did actually select the hour when I was seemingly in the full flush of joy and worldly success. He may have supposed delay to be dangerous, but whatever his motive was, it threw the victory into my hands. In the course of the evening he called me mysteriously aside, and asked to have a private conference there and then. It must have been some strange inspiration which enabled me to divine his motives, and also to feel convinced that he had brought with him the necessary proofs to show me how entirely I was at their mercy. I dissembled the natural excitement which I certainly felt at being called on to make my

death-struggle, as I may so call it, when I was so little prepared for the emergency. He had all his plans ready and matured, while I was required to foil such a keen-witted antagonist without the slightest warning. But it was his too great eagerness which threw the palm of victory into my hands, as you shall see.

"We went into my writing-room, and, during the few seconds which elapsed since our leaving the ball-room, I had formed my determination. By a clever stratagem I threw Farebrother completely off his guard, and led him to suppose that I was perfectly ignorant of what he was about, refusing to see the affected air of painful duty which he assumed in his opening words. I managed so well to distract his attention that he had no suspicions of my attempting the slightest violence, the result of which was, that, catching him at an opportune moment off his guard, I rushed upon him and forced him on the floor in such a position that he lay help-

lessly at my mercy. He then saw the fatal mistake which he had made, but it was too late. I affected to know that he had the papers proving my insanity, and the will in my cousin's favour, in his pocket, and demanded them to be given up. He hesitated, and I presented a revolver at his head, swearing I would blow out his brains if the papers were not at once produced. No man could resist this, and the whole documents were the next moment in my hands. That was not all. I made him write out a certificate, dated some years back, proving my entire sanity and fitness to manage my own affairs, although this may not be required so much now. My triumph was absolute and complete, as you have seen. I raised my antagonist from the floor, and helped him to recover his senses, which undoubtedly must have been sorely shaken. The result of all this you can easily see, for it gives me undisputed possession of the documents necessary to retain myself in my proud eminence

in the eyes of the world. Milroy is helpless, and hardly one man in a million would credit Farebrother's story, unsupported by any written evidence. You may say that I stand once more in the face of Heaven a free and unshackled man.

"Alas! Ida, would that it were the case. I have maintained my position of wealth and splendour, but what are riches to me? I know that my mind is diseased, and that no earthly physician can work out my cure. Moments of delirious, passionate joy and excitement I may have, but can these compensate for days of tormenting fears and long nights of sleepless agony? At present I can master the fiend within me, that waits for the moment when I must yield; but the strife is an unequal one, and the catastrophe horrible—most horrible. Shall I bow my proud spirit to my fate, and consign myself to a living tomb—a very hell upon earth—or dash my wretched body, an unbidden guest, into the realms of eternity? Oh! Ida,

pity, pity me. I must take my resolution ere three days be over; and who shall say what it may be? You may wonder why I did not at once destroy all proofs that menaced me with such absolute ruin; but why need I deprive another of the great inheritance which he may use for the good of his fellows, as I assuredly have squandered it in supine and reckless folly? If I am seen no more, then know that the proofs requisite to seat Edward Milroy in my place are *not* destroyed.

"My pen would fain stop, but one word more. Ida, I loved you deeply and truly. I saw from the hour you grew into woman's estate that you were possessed of a clear and powerful will, great talents, and a warm heart. Despising the feelings of others, as I did, I liked to dally with your affections, as you may have thought, but in reality I was merely making trial of their intensity. I do not deny that from the first I admired your cleverness, force of will, and beauty of

person; still, I did not wish to encourage the affection which I saw clearly was fast overcoming your proud spirit. Not that I did not deem you worthy to be my bride, but my mind and ideas were so unsettled that I could not bear that you should fall too deeply into a passion which I hardly dared to return. To what a life should I have consigned you had I allowed our union to have been brought about? Knowing, as I did, that it was merely a question of time, when the evil spirit within me should at length turn round and rend me, how could I inflict such bitter agony upon you, my gentle, confiding Ida, as to cause you to be a witness of the imbecile ravings of a madman? No, Ida, a better and happier fate is, I trust, in store for you, and some day you may look back, with a glance, it may be, dimmed with sorrow, upon the trials through which you have emerged, but from a resting-place of permanent and perfect joy. Had I been blessed with a nature similar to those

of my fellow-men our lives might have been blended together, and I should then have done my best to prove that I was not unworthy of the love of a generous, a trusting, and a pure-minded girl. I can say no more, Ida, but must now bid you farewell! The future before me is one of deepest darkness; I see no ray of Heavenly light gleaming through the lowering gloom. Should we never meet again, I fervently pray that you may be spared to enjoy a peaceful and happy life. I know that I shall often be remembered in your prayers, and, I say it solemnly in the face of Heaven, I trust that, should my sad and tortured spirit be ever cleansed from its load of sin, a happy meeting may yet be vouchsafed to us in another world. I know not what to do, but I promise that you shall once more hear from me, before I seek out that solitude which henceforth must be my lot.

"Ida, good-bye! think sometimes of me, but do not fret over the past Look to the

future, and believe me, that an all-merciful Providence will yet shed a healing dew over your wounded heart. Adieu, dearest Ida, once more, a long adieu!

"Your own

"Aubrey De Vaux."

During the reading of this strange and circumstantial letter, the greatest interest and anxiety were evidenced by the four gentlemen present. Its remarkable revelations made a profound impression upon Edward Milroy, or De Vaux as he really was, but the Baron and Farebrother too were also intensely interested in the extraordinary story. All were alike struck with the marvellous display of cool narration, and patient unravelling of a complicated thread of events, on the part of a man who was admittedly labouring under such a terrible mental disease. They could not agree, however, as to the course of action which it indicated, the doctor inclining to the belief that it was

penned in direct anticipation of suicide, while Milroy firmly maintained that Aubrey must have intended to quit England for ever, and endeavour to seek repose in some far distant land. Consequently it was impossible to set the question at rest whether his death had been accidental or deliberately planned. The evidence of Farmer Crossley went strongly to favour the former hypothesis, and, indeed, the engine-driver seemed to suppose that Aubrey had been spell-bound and fascinated by the train bearing down upon him, because similar instances were often known where men had been confused and panic-stricken under almost identical circumstances.

The Baron now left the library and sought his daughter's room, but only to find her in the same state of total mental and bodily prostration, in which she had been since the night when she was carried insensible from the room in which Aubrey De Vaux was stretched out in the trappings of the grave.

CHAPTER XV.

Our story is now nearly over, and but one scene remains to be told. As was indicated in a former chapter, Ida's reason had indeed received a shock from which the Baron feared she would never recover, although by Doctor Farebrother's urgent advice, she had been removed to the south of England, in the hope of being restored to health by a total change of scene. Her bodily weakness was distressing to observe, but it was nothing when compared with the wan and listless expression in her once beautiful face. She hardly ever spoke, and her finely proportioned figure was wasting away to a mere skeleton. We shall take leave of her in the hope that she may find that repose

and joy in another world which her sad lot in this one would seem to have merited. Chastened and subdued in spirit, she looked forward with patient resignation for the hour of her release.

* * * *

One warm, but pleasant afternoon, about a month after the event narrated in our last chapter took place, two gentlemen entered the small churchyard near the village of H——. They proceeded up a side path under some leafy elm trees, until they stood before a grave, at the head of which a pretty marble tablet had recently been set up. Upon the tablet was engraved the following simple inscription :—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
MARY FORESTER,
DIED 22 JULY, 1865,
AGED TWENTY YEARS.

Edward De Vaux was one of the gentlemen, and Doctor Farebrother the other. They both stood looking silently and sadly at the white tablet before them.

"I think they must be here shortly," said De Vaux, looking at his watch, after some minutes had elapsed.

"Yes, it is the time that I appointed," replied the Doctor. "Stay!—I think I see De Burgh, at any rate, coming along the road. Yes, it is he! You and he are very good friends now, are you not? The old quarrel, with its extraordinary results, has been completely made up."

"I am happy to say that it has, and all is, I trust, buried in oblivion. But Massey I dread to meet—his grief was so terrible; and I feel that, to a certain extent, I was guilty of Mary's death."

"You must not dwell upon that painful subject now. All enmity is to be forgotten at her grave; and besides, I have explained everything to Massey. In the fearful position in which you were placed—knowing that all your motions were watched, and with some vague and terrible misfortune always impending over your head, you could never,

in bare mercy, have married Mary. You did not know but that you might consign her to a life of misery, far deeper and more difficult to bear, than what would result from the consequences of your simply seeing her no more. I judged you very harshly at the time; but now I admit, that no other course was open to you. The one sad pity was that you ever met."

"Indeed, Farebrother, you are right, but the pain is over now; and Massey's wound, too, I trust, is healing?"

"Yes; I saw him two days ago. He is still very much depressed; but she had such a beautiful and peaceful death that the sting was almost entirely taken away."

Mr. De Burgh now joined the two gentlemen, and they all cordially shook hands. The former gazed wistfully at the white tablet bearing the record of Mary's early death. Almost immediately afterwards Massey was seen to enter the churchyard, and De Burgh fell back a little, while the

Doctor and De Vaux advanced to meet the clergyman.

"Massey," said Doctor Farebrother, as he shook hands with the former, "I have a pleasing duty to fulfil in placing your hand within that of Edward De Vaux, beside the grave of her whom you both loved."

At these words De Vaux took Wilfred Massey's hand and wrung it in silence, while a flush of emotion glowed in the faces of both.

"You know," said the Doctor, "the whole of De Vaux's extraordinary, almost unparalleled story, and you both deeply feel for each other in this sad and solemn hour. To make this meeting more complete, and that those three who bore a pure and honourable love for the girl who sleeps so quietly at our feet, may henceforth feel at peace with one another, I have asked Mr. De Burgh to meet us here to-day. You have seen each other before in happier days,

but now meet again in strangely altered circumstances."

De Burgh also came forward and shook Massey warmly by the hand, and the four gentlemen moved up to the narrow grave of Mary Forester. For a few minutes they all kept silence, each one regarding the last resting-place of her whom, in life, they had loved so dearly.

"Mr. De Vaux," said Massey, with emotion, "you know that I have no spark of ill feeling towards you now. The love which you bore that sweet girl was as pure as my own; and the terrible secret which you always had to conceal within your own breast must have borne bitter fruits for years past."

"You have spoken truly, Mr. Massey. I had indeed a weary life, with each bright prospect, as it opened up before me, clouded over by a vague shadow of mysterious danger and horror. Still, even in the lowest depths of mental wretchedness in which I

was plunged, I never entirely relinquished the glorious feeling of hope that one day I might fill an honoured place among my fellow men. My motto ever was, and ever shall be—'I bide my time!'"

THE END.

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